

THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	3
THE INSPIRATION AND INERRANCY OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES	4
— Howard W. Tepker	
HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD	16
— Martin H. Franzmann	
THE CHURCH UNDER THE SCRIPTURES	24
— Ralph A. Bohlmann	
THE CHURCH UNDER THE SCRIPTURES	44
— Herbert J. A. Bouman	
GOSPEL—SCRIPTURE RELATIONSHIP	62
— Fred P. Kramer	

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PREFACE

In December 1974 the Council of Presidents called for a theological convocation to discuss current theological concerns in our church. Jointly sponsored by the Council of Presidents, the Board of Directors of Synod, and the President of Synod, this convocation will bring together over 300 participants from all parts of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod including, pastors, teachers, and lay people from each of the districts, representatives from the various synodical boards, commissions, committees, and representatives from synodical schools and the Joint Project for Theological Education.

“The Nature and Function of Holy Scripture” was selected as the general theme of the convocation by the planning committee. It was decided to have five major presentations on four topics relating to this theme: Inspiration and Inerrancy, Gospel-Scripture Relationship, Historical-Critical Method, and two presentations on The Church Under the Scriptures. It was also decided that these presentations should be made available to all convocation participants prior to the convocation. It is my pleasure to make available to you the five essays contained in this publication. Please read and study them carefully. Convocation participants are invited to send requests for clarification to the authors of these essays no later than April 7. These requests will be taken into consideration in the presentation to be given by these 5 men at the April 14-18 convocation.

When controversies arose in the past, the confessing fathers of Lutheranism did not ignore controversial issues and simply agree to disagree. They were prepared on the basis of God’s Word to discuss the matters at issue amicably and charitably with the hope and the prayer that “our differences may be reconciled, and we may be united in one, true religion, even as we are all under one Christ.” (AC Preface 10)

It is also my prayer that this convocation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit might provide an opportunity for a discussion of the issues troubling our church today and that it might be an instrument for effecting reconciliation and peace in the church under the Holy Scriptures, so that we may all “with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 15:6)

J. A. O. Preus
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THE INSPIRATION AND INERRANCY OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

The inspiration of the Holy Scripture with all that this implies is a matter that has occupied the attention of Christendom for many years. Numerous statements have been issued in this regard by concerned church bodies. Of special interest to us are those statements prepared by the Lutheran Church of Australia and the documents presented to our church by our Commission on Theology and Church Relations. Within little more than a decade the CTCR has released two documents on *Revelation, Inspiration and Inerrancy*, and is now preparing an even more exhaustive study of these important doctrines.

In presenting this paper, therefore, I shall not attempt to repeat all of the many important facets and aspects of this important subject. Instead, I shall address myself to a few of the more pressing issues that have arisen in our midst. Among the issues before us are:

1) Can it be said that divine inspiration makes the Scripture a unique and qualitatively different book, or does the word "inspiration" allow for the view that other writings have also been inspired?

2) Is it adequate to say that the Scriptures are inspired chiefly in the sense that they possess effective power to bring men and women to salvation through the Gospel, or does inspiration imply also that God is the Author of the Holy Scriptures and that they are, therefore, the only Judge, Rule, and Norm according to which as the only Touchstone all Doctrines should and must be understood and Judged as Good or Evil, Right or Wrong (FC, Ep, Rule and Norm. 7)?

3) Is it adequate to say that the Scriptures are inerrant, infallible, and wholly reliable only in the sense that they say what God wants them to say and accomplish what God wants them to do. Or does inerrancy also imply that there are no contradictions nor factual errors in the Scripture?

4) Is it permissible to make the inerrancy of Scripture dependent on human certainty attained by rational argument and demonstration?

5) Does the fact that the Scriptures are inspired guarantee the truth of the Gospel and the complete inerrancy of all materials in the Scripture?

These we believe are just a few of the more important issues that are before us.

I. THE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

What is inspiration? The Nicene Creed defines inspiration in the familiar words: "I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds

from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, *who spake by the prophets.*" Over the course of the years and especially since the time of the Reformation it has become necessary, however, for the church to define this doctrine more sharply.

In recent years it has been suggested that if we want to understand more fully what is meant by the word "Inspiration", we must look more carefully at what the Scripture says concerning the power, the work, and the blessing of the Holy Spirit in general and then apply the knowledge gained in that way to our understanding of inspiration. This approach offers some promise, but it also calls for some words of caution.

A. The Spirit as the Spirit of Power

In studying the Scripture we recognize immediately that in both the Old Testament and the New the Holy Spirit is presented to us as the source of power in the church. It is the Spirit who builds the Kingdom. It is He who already in the Old Testament gave Joseph the ability to interpret the dreams which Pharaoh had concerning the famine in the land of Egypt. (Genesis 41:32). It is the Spirit who gave Moses the gifts which he needed to lead the people of Israel for forty years through the wilderness (Numbers 11:16-17). When Saul was anointed King over Israel, it was the Spirit who "came mightily upon Saul" and turned him into a "new man" who was equipped to be the ruler of God's people (I Samuel 10:6). The Spirit entered also into David when he was anointed king and equipped him with the necessary gifts to become Israel's greatest ruler (I Samuel 16:13). The Spirit was especially active in building the Kingdom of God when He equipped the holy prophets to write the Word of God accurately and inerrantly, as the Lord wanted it revealed to his people for all times.

In the New Testament the Spirit's work was intensified. This became evident even before the events of Pentecost. Early in his ministry John the Baptist proclaimed the good news that Jesus would pour out His Spirit on His Church in a very special measure (Matt. 3:11).

Prior to His suffering and death on the cross, Jesus gave His disciples the promise of the Spirit. The Spirit would be their *parakletos*, their Comforter and Counsellor (John 14:26). He would guide them into all truth; He would teach them all things and remind them of all that Jesus had told them while He was with them (John 14:17, 26; 16:13).

Shortly before His ascension into heaven, the Savior told the disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they had received power from on high to witness the Christ in all the world (Acts 1:5, 8).

In the Book of Acts it is evident that these promises concerning the Holy Spirit were fulfilled. With the coming of Pentecost the Holy Spirit equipped the followers of Jesus with such spiritual gifts as were needed to carry out the task of evangelizing the world. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples possessed an intense desire to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They

employed every opportunity to witness to the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of their Lord. They proclaimed Christ with new courage and boldness, and it is evident that they understood better than before Pentecost the purpose and significance of Christ's death and resurrection (Acts 2:14-40; 3:12-26; 4:1-22; 5:29-32; 7:1-60; 8:32-35). Of special significance is also the fact that the Spirit moved and equipped the apostles and evangelists to place into writing the books of the New Testament Scriptures.

Some conclusions. From these few examples of the Spirit's activity as it is recorded in the Bible, we can draw a number of important conclusions:

1) In all of the mighty acts of God when the Spirit equips His followers to perform special tasks, it is always the Spirit who takes the initiative. He is the One who is active, the One controlling the events which take place. For this reason events of this type are usually introduced with words such as: "The Spirit came mightily upon him" (Judges 14:6), "The Spirit took possession of Gideon" (Judges 6:35), "The Spirit of the Lord fell upon me" (Ezekiel 11:5), "I am filled with power and the Holy Spirit" (Micah 3:8), "They were all filled with the Spirit" (Acts 2:4). The Spirit's purposes may vary from case to case but He is always the efficient cause of what is taking place.

2) Men are involved in these mighty acts of God but only in a secondary sense. Man participates when the Spirit calls him to do so. He participates when God equips him by giving him the gifts which are necessary to perform the tasks. This is particularly evident in the New Testament where such gifts are called *Charismata*, meaning gifts of grace, not gifts which men have earned and developed by their native powers. Thus the emphasis is always on God as the Giver.

3) This is very apparent in the case of the prophets and other holy writers. They were called directly by God Himself (Amos 7:15; Exodus 3:1-4; 1 Samuel 3:1-15; Isaiah 6). Between the prophet and God there was direct personal communication, and to him God revealed His purposes (Genesis 15:1-18; 18:17; Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1 ff.). Prophets were not just ordinary men who possessed insight and intelligence, with ability above the average to write history. Instead, they were special instruments of the Lord, equipped to perform a special task. As mouthpieces the prophets were expected to restate precisely what God had revealed to them and what He wished them to write or speak. (Exodus 4:15-16; 7:1-2).

4) The prophets were aware that the Spirit spoke through them and that they were to communicate His message. They took their task seriously, but served willingly. David declared shortly before his death: "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his Word was in my tongue." (2 Samuel 23:2), and the Apostle Paul states: "My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." (1 Corinthians 2:4, Cf. 2-13). And again: "Christ has wrought through me . . . by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that

I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ.” (Romans 15:18, 19).

5) Being inspired by the Spirit the prophets were enabled to predict future events, especially prophecies dealing with the coming Savior. [Isaiah 11:2-6; Isaiah 42:1-4; Cf. Matthew 12:18; Isaiah 61:1 etc.; (Luke 4:17) Deuteronomy 18:21-22; Isaiah 38:5-6; Isaiah 39:6, 7.]

6) Because the holy writers were inspired by God they knew that what they wrote and spoke was God’s word. (1 Corinthians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 14:37; 2 Corinthians 13:3; Galatians 1:8, 11-12).

Thus a study of the mighty acts of the Spirit in both the Old and the New Testaments reveals that the Spirit is always the dynamic force, the Efficient Cause. He is the One who is acting in and through man. This is very significant in any study of the inspiration of the Scriptures. It indicates that the Spirit is the primary author.

Does this view of inspiration give sufficient attention to what has been called the human side of Scripture? Or, does it ignore the fact that the various books of the Bible were written by men? Actually, when we refer to the inspired Scripture, may we properly speak of a divine and a human side? The divine and human aspects of Scripture must never be separated one from the other, and certainly they should never be pitted against each other. To speak of the human side as if it is that part of God’s Word which is most vulnerable to error is to deny the divine character of the Word of God and turn the Bible into a book of human writings, which the Spirit in some ways seeks to use in revealing His will to men.

Of course, there is a way in which we can properly speak of a human side of the Bible. The Scripture does have a human side in the sense that in and through it the Spirit of God condescends to give man His revelation in human language. But this certainly does not detract from the divine character of the Bible any more than did the human nature in Christ detract from His divine nature. When the Spirit of God condescended to speak to the creature in the creature’s own language, this was proof of His immeasurable grace and love. Luther can hardly say enough in praising God’s “Leutseligkeit” and “Freundlichkeit.” Luther was always astonished that the Holy Spirit has come so near to man. This is true of the incarnate God, as well as it is of the Holy Scripture. God has revealed himself to man to the extent that man can bear it.

Another aspect of the human side of Scripture is the fact that the Spirit condescended to reveal His good and gracious will to man through *human writers*. Lutherans have no intention to violate the humanity of the holy men of God. They were instruments of God in a way that they were not robots, dictaphones, tape recorders, or typewriters; they were used by the Spirit with all their human attributes and peculiarities to write the divine Word, employing the gifts which the Holy Spirit gave them. At the same time we cannot acquiesce to the demand of modern theologians that the holy men were permitted to write and speak as independent and self-determining authors. The union of the human and the divine in Scripture is an instrumental

union, and the two must never be separated in a way that makes primary authors of the human writers. This is in full accord with the Nicene Creed which says of the Spirit: "Who spake through the prophets," and with the Augsburg Confession which asks: "Did the Holy Spirit in vain forewarn of these things?" (AC XXVIII, Par. 49). In the words of the sainted Dr. Martin Naumann:

The Spirit breathes and the result is not a hermaphrodite or a hybrid but a unique eternal book, a unit organically one, in which the one blood of the Christ flows through all its veins. There is no real authorship of man in cooperation with God; the doctrine of Scripture too teaches monergism. We are not called to speak a judgment to decide whose child the Book is, nor are we to carry out the decision of the modern Bible critic and theologian to take the critical sword and cut the Book into the human and the divine. (*The "Human Side" of Scripture* p. 5)

For proof we go back to the Scripture itself. There is no passage in which the person of the human writer received an independent emphasis. The human element is always dependent (1 Corinthians 2:13; Romans 3:2; 1 Thessalonians 2). There is never any competition between God's Word and the word of the holy men of God. The human writers are mentioned but in such a humble, unobtrusive way that there is no room for weighing one against the other.

Again we must repeat: In all these special mighty acts of God, it is the Holy Spirit who is always active. Men are involved as His instruments whom He equips for their task so that they can accomplish His purpose.

A few words of caution. When one examines the Scripture to restudy all of the activities of the Spirit as they are revealed to us in His Word, one finds that His works are many and varied. He created the world. (Psalm 104:30). He equipped the judges and kings of Israel so that they could perform their tasks in the interest of God's people (Judges 6:1-6; 33-34; Judges 11:4-6, 29, 32-33, etc.). He inspired the holy prophets and apostles (Ezekiel 2:1-7; Micah 3:8; Zechariah 7:12). In the words of Luther He "calls us by the Gospel, enlightens us with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps us in the true faith." But one must not use the term "inspiration" as a label to cover every act of the Spirit. Inspiration is a term used in Scripture to designate a very unique act of the Holy Spirit, a mysterious act by which the Holy Spirit "so prompted and moved the holy writers to write and so assisted them that while they were writing, they correctly grasped the idea, were enabled faithfully to write and fittingly to express with infallible truth all those things which He had bidden them to write. Otherwise, God himself would not have been the Author of everything in the Sacred Scriptures." *

B. The Spirit in His relation to Jesus

Another of the familiar themes running through both the Old and the New Testaments is the close relationship between the Spirit and the Son of God.

* Union Document of the Lutheran Free Churches of Germany.

While the Old Testament especially speaks in very dramatic terms of the relationship between the Spirit and the chosen people of Israel, while it speaks in even more glowing terms of the relation between the Spirit and the prophets, one recognizes immediately that the prophets reached a climax when they described the relation between the Spirit and the promised Messiah. The prophets predicted that the Spirit would descend upon Jesus in all of His fullness (Isaiah 11:2-6; Isaiah 42:1-4; Isaiah 61:1 ff.). In the New Testament this relationship continues. At His baptism the Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:16). Through the evangelist Luke the Lord relates how Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted of the devil (Luke 4:1-14). The Savior Himself corroborates the prophecies of Isaiah when in His first sermon at Nazareth He announces: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." (Luke 4:15). And in the power of the Spirit Jesus then went about casting out devils and performing many miracles of healing and doing other wonders (Matthew 12:28; Acts 10:38).

Needless to say, these passages in no way conflict with the fact that Jesus was true God and was therefore fully equipped for all His tasks by virtue of that fact. There is here no suggestion of subordinationism, for our God is triune, three equal persons, each of them God but in one essence. It is necessary furthermore to recall that this relationship between the Spirit and Jesus of Nazareth spoken of in the New Testament takes into consideration the fact that our Savior was at that time also true man in the state of humiliation.

Another book of the Bible which speaks clearly and rather fully of the relationship between the Spirit and the Son of God is the Gospel of John. In this section of Scripture the holy writer records much of Jesus' own teaching concerning the Spirit. In chapter 3 the Savior begins with a lengthy discourse about conversion in which He emphasizes that the Spirit is the Source and Giver of spiritual life. He seeks to convince Nicodemus that he must be born of water and of the Spirit if he is to enter the Kingdom of God. He must believe in Jesus Christ who would give His life as a sacrifice on the cross (John 3:16). In the following chapters of John's Gospel are recorded a number of incidents and stories illustrating that the work of Jesus is also the work of the Spirit; they work together for the salvation of man. In passages such as John 7:37-38 the Savior is clearly pointing to the great influence which the Spirit would have on the church after the event of Pentecost when in the strength of the Spirit the church would witness to Jesus Christ.

At the conclusion of His earthly ministry, in those solemn hours just before His suffering and death, Jesus again enters upon a lengthy discussion of the role of the Spirit in the future of the church. He tells His disciples that He will pray the Father and "He will give you another Comforter to be with you forever" (John 14:16). And when this Comforter comes, "He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (John 14:25 f.). The Comforter will remain in the church as the Missionary of missionaries.

What now does this imply with regard to the inspiration and the content of Scripture? It shows rather clearly that the primary message and content of the inspired Scripture is the Gospel. The Lutheran Church in the Spirit of the reformer has always emphasized this fact.

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations has explained:

According to the Lutheran Symbols the Gospel is the center of the Scriptures. For that reason they see everything in the Scriptures as related to the Gospel in such a way that they can say: "Everything in the Word of God is written down for us . . . in order that by steadfastness, by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope! (Romans 15:4)." (FC SD XI, 12). (*Gospel and Scripture*, page 11).

Hermann Sasse writes:

"It is faith in Christ as the Savior of the world that opens the door to the entire Scripture. St. Paul makes this clear when he speaks of the inability of the Jews to understand the Old Testament. . . . The Bible remains a dark book until we find Christ in it. A stained glass church window makes no sense until it is viewed against the light. So the Bible conveys its true meaning to us if we see Christ as its real content. "To Him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name," (Acts 10:43). This is Peter's understanding of the Bible. It is confirmed by what the risen Lord tells the Apostles about the Law, the Prophets, and the Scriptures (Luke 24:25-27, 44)." (*Accents in Luther's Theology*, p. 64).

But this is not to imply that only the Gospel is inspired, and that only the Gospel is authoritative and normative. Scripture clearly testifies: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (II Timothy 3:16). The entire Bible is God's Book. This is also the opinion of the Lutheran Confessions where the Bible is called "Scriptures of the Holy Spirit," and the "divine Holy Scripture" (Apology Preface, 9: Augsburg Confession XXVIII, 28; See also Augsburg Confession XXVIII, 43, 49).

II. THE INERRANCY OF THE SCRIPTURES

A third theme which is prominent in both the Old and New Testaments proclaims that the Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. In the Old Testament it is evident that the prophets were to announce the message of God accurately or be declared false prophets. It was wholly unthinkable that a prophet would preach a message other than that which God had given him. Such a prophet "shall die" (Deuteronomy 18:20). The true prophet was recognized by signs which he was enabled by God to perform (Exodus 4:8; Isaiah 7:11, 14). But that alone was not sufficient, for even false prophets at times performed signs (Deuteronomy 13:1-2; Exodus 7:11, etc.). In addition to signs, therefore, the prophet's predictions must also be fulfilled (Deuteronomy 18:22), and above all, his teachings must be in accord with the revealed Scripture (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). The prophets were the mouthpieces of God, His spokesmen. The

Word of the Lord came to them in various ways, and they were commanded to proclaim it accurately. (Deuteronomy 18:17-18). To qualify the prophets to fulfill their great responsibility the Spirit of God equipped them with necessary talents and gifts. Therefore, a prophet was called “a man of the Spirit” or the Spirit’s man (Hosea 9:7). The prophet was a man “filled with the Spirit” (Micah 3:8).

This theme carries over also into the New Testament. On the night of His betrayal, when Jesus promised His disciples that He would send them the Comforter, He called The Comforter “the Spirit of Truth”. “When the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. . . . He will declare to you the things that are to come” (John 16:12-15). One of the Comforter’s major task would be to teach them all things and help them remember those things which Jesus had told the disciples (John 14:25-26).

What is the meaning of the word “truth” in this connection? The Old Testament term *emeth* which is frequently translated “truth” suggests qualities such as firmness, stability, reliability, and faithfulness. Truth is a quality of God’s nature. He is the only unchanging and constant reality in a world which is in constant flux. His Word is also truth (John 17:17; Psalm 43:3; Psalm 119:43). His Word is sure and reliable. This applies also to the factual information which Jesus taught His disciples (John 14:25-26).

To lead the disciples into all truth and to bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had told them would be a most important function of the Spirit in the days after Pentecost, when the disciples and apostles would be writing the Holy Scriptures. This certainly gives us the assurance that when we read the books of the Bible which were penned by these men, we can know that their accounts are accurate despite their weaknesses and humanness, because the Spirit of Truth was their Teacher and was leading them into all truth and calling to their memory the many discourses that Jesus had had with them and the many events that had taken place during Jesus’ life on earth.

Inspiration must therefore mean more than just this that the Gospel is effective and produces results. Likewise, inerrancy certainly implies more than the fact that the Scriptures accomplish what Jesus wants them to do, and they say what God wants them to say. Of course, we would not deny either of these. However, we are more inclined to speak of this concept as the efficacy or efficaciousness of the Holy Scriptures. Our Lutheran forefathers were accustomed to define inerrancy in more precise terms than this. The following is one such expression:

We pledge adherence to the Holy Scriptures as the only source and norm of doctrine and faith (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-21). Over against modern theology we maintain, now as formerly, the doctrine of the verbal inspiration (1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16). We believe and confess that Scripture not only contains God’s Word, but is God’s Word, and hence no error or contradictions of any sort are found therein. (Intersynodical – Chicago – Theses, *Doctrinal Declarations*, page 37, paragraph 173).

Another more recent document states:

None of the natural limitations which belong to the human mind, even when under inspiration of the Holy Ghost, can impair the authority or the inerrancy of the Word of God; for Holy Scripture is the book of divine truth which transcends everything called truth by the wise men of this world (1 Corinthians 1:17 ff. 27; Colossians 2:8) and is therefore able to make us wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:16). (*Theses on Scripture and Inspiration by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia*, p. 22).

This statement of faith is in full accord with the Lutheran Confessions.

Though the Confessions do not use the precise words "infallible" or "inerrant", it is evident that they do not expect to find in the Scriptures the contradictions which characterize the writings of fallible human authors. In the single instance where the Symbols refer to a seeming contradiction in the Scripture, they offer a solution which completely removes the difficulty (Apology, XXIV, 28). The Symbols do not grant that Jeremiah contradicts Moses. The Symbols therefore have no need to account for contradictions in terms of the Bible's historical dimensions or to adopt a view of Biblical authority which holds that since the authority of the Bible resides exclusively in the Gospel, discrepancies here and there in Scripture are of no consequence." (*Gospel and Scripture*, p. 11).

But at this point the question may arise: "Does such a view of inerrancy take into account sufficiently the historical and chronological difficulties that confront the serious Bible student?" "What about the problems which appear in the various parallel accounts of historical incidents in the Bible?"

First, it should be said that Lutheran theologians recognize the existence of difficulties in the Holy Scripture for which they have no satisfactory answers. However, they do not then go to the other extreme and conclude that these must all be errors, and for that reason the inspired Scriptures cannot be called inerrant.

Dr. Theodore Engelder, in his book *Scripture Cannot Be Broken*, takes note of the fact that Dr. Stoeckhardt had some difficulty with Matthew 27:9 in which there appears the quotation of a prophecy spoken by Zechariah (11:12), but Matthew says that Jeremiah spoke the prophecy. Dr. Stoeckhardt handles the situation as Lutheran scholars have always done in the past when he comments:

Others before me have been unable to solve this difficulty, ~~nor~~ or can I solve it. But instead of exhausting oneself with vague guesses, it would be much better simply to admit that we do not know and let it go at that. After all, it would not be the only obscure passage in Scripture which we cannot decipher. (*Scripture Cannot Be Broken*, p. 60).

Luther, too, was equally free to confess occasionally that he was puzzled about the meaning of certain passages. In connection with John 2:13-16, the reformer raised the question how statements in Matthew and John could be harmonized. What conclusion does he draw? After some discussion he says:

There are questions and there will remain questions, which I am not able to answer. Nothing much depends on it. What do I care that there are many sharp and super clever people who raise all kinds of questions and demand an answer on every point." (Martin Luther, *Saemtliche Schriften*, VII, 1780 and following).

To all of this Theodore Engelder adds the wise comment:

"Here is one fact which is well established: The great theologians of the church are not able to harmonize all contradictions in the Bible. Nor are they able to prove, by science, that all the scientific statements in the Bible are true; to demonstrate in all cases that the Biblical historian is right and the secular historian wrong; and to adduce corroborative testimony in all cases from outside sources. We do not claim that every historical statement contained in the Pentateuch can be proven to be true by external testimony. But this fact should not disturb us. It is not worthy of a Christian to let that fact lead him to doubt in any way the trustworthiness of Scripture. It may embarrass some to be forced to make Luther's and Peter Martyr's and Augustine's confession of ignorance—and it should put those to shame whose ignorance is due to their neglect of serious study of the case. But we have no reason to be embarrassed and perturbed at our inability to solve all Biblical difficulties. We do not, and the most pronounced foes of Verbal inspiration do not, feel that difficulties about a certain philosophical truth cast doubt upon that truth. When we and the Bible critics find a statement in some secular book which seems to contradict some other statement in the same book, we do not begin to hoot the writer . . . let us give our Bible the same respectful consideration as reputable human writings received. And let us give it higher respect." (*Ibid.*, pp. 60-61)

Is this perhaps a naive, unscholarly approach to the problems that appear in the Bible? I think not, for great scholars in other fields are ready to admit ignorance and hesitate to draw conclusions when all the facts are not available. They suspend judgment. Should theologians not be willing to do the same when they are searching for the truth in God's Holy Book?

Nor does this imply that our Lutheran forefathers closed their eyes to the evidence. On the contrary, they were taking very seriously the fact that the Holy Spirit did not dictate the Scriptures, but He inspired the holy writers in a way which allowed them to use their own style of writing, their own research, and to pursue their own purpose for writing.

To avoid misunderstanding it is important that we note carefully and precisely what our church intends to imply by the term "inerrancy."

1) Inerrancy is not intended to imply that there must be absolute verbal uniformity when one holy writer quotes another. Variations of this type were not classified as errors by our Lutheran forefathers.

2) Inerrancy does not imply uniformity in the use of symbolic language. In order to communicate His Word the Holy Spirit allowed the holy writers great freedom in their use of literary types such as parables, poetry, proverbs, or historical narrative. Ezekiel's description of the throne of God (Ezekiel 1)

is quite different from that of Isaiah (Isaiah 6). The living creatures which carried the throne of God in Ezekiel's version do not appear to be the same as those which surrounded the throne in Isaiah's vision. These two narratives, however, were not considered contradictory by our Lutheran forefathers.

3) Lutheran theologians of the past did not regard as errors, expressions such as "the four corners of the earth," or "the rising and setting of the sun," or "the heavens above and sheol below", expressions which are still being used today without any scientific implications intended. The *Theses of the Lutheran Church of Australia* comments as follows in this regard: "These evidences of the limitations of the human mind in no way invalidate the inerrancy of God's written word but illustrate the servant form of the written Word of God, which is interested not in technical precision for its own sake but in a popular, intelligible presentation which best serves the saving purpose of God." (page 4).

4) Furthermore, inerrancy certainly must not be applied to the variant readings that are found in existing manuscripts because of copyist mistakes or because of deliberate alterations. Nor does inerrancy apply to incorrect translations that are found in various parts of existing Bible versions.

Thus, to summarize briefly, Lutheran theologians of the past and many also in the present grant that there are variations in the Biblical accounts which they are unable to harmonize; there are also difficulties and problems in chronologies which they are unable to resolve to the extent that human reason would like; there are difficulties with individual passages that we may not be able to explain with our limited knowledge; there are also doctrines which challenge the imagination of man. But this should not surprise us, for Scripture itself tells us that in the epistles of Paul there "are some things hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16); still our faith continues to confess that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and therefore inerrant.

Both inspiration and inerrancy are articles of faith. They cannot be proven or demonstrated by extra-biblical evidence. Nor dare we make the inerrancy of Scripture dependent upon proof that may be attained by rational argumentation or empirical verification. Inerrancy "cannot be seen with human eyes nor can it be proven to human reason; it is an article of faith, a belief in something which is hidden and not obvious" (*Statements of the Lutheran Church in Australia*, page 4).

At the same time our belief in the inerrancy of Scripture rests on a firm foundation, for the Bible itself assures us that it is God's word, given by inspiration of God, a marvelous unity, which is perfect, and sure, right and true (Psalms 19:7-9; 119:160; John 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:13; 10:35).

As we consider the reliability and trustworthiness of the Scriptures, we must surely take into account the fact that Jesus gave His unqualified endorsement to the writings of the Old Testament. Time after time the Savior settled a theological argument with an adversary by quoting from the Old Testament

Scripture, employing words such as: "It is written" (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10; 11:10; Luke 7:27) or "Have you never read in the Scripture" (Mark 12:10; Matthew 21:16, 42, etc.), or "You are wrong because you know neither the Scripture nor the power of God" (Matthew 22:27); at other times He made statements such as "David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declared. . ." (Mark 12:36). At no time did He cast the least suspicion on any book, or any section, passage, or word in the Scripture. When He described the Scriptures, He spoke of them as the Word which originated with God; He spoke of them as the Oracles of God (Mark 7:10, 13).

The Lutheran Symbols confess the inerrancy of the Scriptures with the simple and forceful words: "They will not lie to you" (Large Catechism, D, 76). The Apology (Pref. 9) describes the Bible as "the Scripture of The Holy Ghost." The Smalcald Articles (II 15) set up the invariable rule: "The Word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel." According to the Formula of Concord, the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of both Testaments are "the pure, limpid fountain of Israel" (FC SD SUMM, 3).

In conclusion, we need at all times to take with utmost seriousness the fact that both the inspiration and the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures are articles of faith. We are dealing here with mysteries. We confess our inability to know how God inspired and equipped the apostles and prophets to write His Word accurately and inerrantly. But Scriptures assures us that we have in the Holy Bible God's own Word of truth. Even though we may not be able to resolve all of the problems which our limited understanding finds on these pages, we pray God "open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things in thy law". We open the Holy Scriptures with the attitude of humility which says "Speak Lord, thy servant heareth."

HOWARD W. TEPKER

HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD

PREFACE

Theological terms have a way of degenerating. Both the words “historical” and “critical” are in themselves good, honest useful terms, and, as I hope to show, are imposed upon the student of Scriptures by the Scriptures themselves. Whatever we may decide about the terms, we cannot avoid the thing, cannot avoid being both historical and critical – unless we are content to lapse into a quasi-magical history-less and undiscerning appreciation of Holy Writ and substitute the God of the philosophers for the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and Jesus of Nazareth and substitute in our Creed some bloodless abstraction for the words “suffered under Pontius Pilate”.

“Historical” means simply that we are content to walk where our God walks and reveals Himself for our salvation on earth, amid persons and events. It does not mean that we delude ourselves into believing that three hypotheses are of equal weight with one observable and documentable fact, however useful and helpful a careful hypothesis may be, within its limitation. “Historical” does not mean that we subscribe to the dubious notion that what happened 2000 or 4000 years ago is subject to progressive revaluation with the passage of years and that “modern man” is entitled to a patronizing attitude toward an event or a document merely because it is 2000, or 4000 years old.

“Critical” means simply involving the use of the faculty of discriminating ($\chiρίων!$) appreciation, that we discriminate between the inspired words of Paul, “Drink a little wine for thy stomach’s sake” (1 Tim. 5:23) and the inspired words of Paul when he writes, “Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3).

We *can* decide to avoid the terms “historical” and “critical” when they have become ambiguous or misleading. We *cannot* decide to be unhistorical and uncritical. For if we do, the living word of God will rise up and make damned fools of us all.

HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD

Scripture is filled to the brim with dogma, to be transmitted, to be believed and confessed as our creeds and our confessions transmit and confess it. We as Lutherans are firmly and solemnly committed to that. And yet, one would be hard put to find in all the plentiful variety of Scripture a flatly ‘dogmatic’ statement, unqualified by history and not grounded in history. Wherever we may sit in the Old Testament or the New, we must say with Faust,

... so sitz ich am sausenden Webstuhl der Zeit
und schaue der Gottheit lebendiges Kleid.

The ten words which Moses heard at Sinai were not given him to hear and transmit in a history-less vacuum. They are prefaced and colored by words which hold before the eyes of Israel the God who has acted for His people's liberation:

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." (Ex. 20:2)

The evangelist whom the hymnist describes as a soaring eagle never soared so high that he forgot the ground whereon men walk and die. The John whose eyes were uplifted to behold the Word who was with God and was God everlasting (John 1:1), wrote, almost in the same breath, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, . . . and from his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace." (John 1:14, 16)

And he who wrote that most dogmatic sentence, "God is love" (1 John 4:8), went on at once to put that heavenly truth into an earthly frame of action in the world:

"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him." (1 John 4:9)

This John saw in the confession of Jesus Christ as *come in the flesh* the mark and signature of the Holy Spirit of God and in the denial of the Jesus of history the work of the antichrist (1 John 4:2-3).

Whether we read the Old Testament or the New Testament, whether we hear the Gospel or the Law, we have in our nostrils the earthy smell of history, the omnipresent savor of "What goes on here?" on earth, in the world, among men. And that too not only in the books which we label "historical" but throughout. Whether we hear the Word in Genesis or The Revelation to John, in the utterance of the Psalmist, who speaks of God as "enthroned on the praises of *Israel* (Ps. 22:31), or in the Chronicler, who painstakingly records the generations from Adam (1 Chron. 1:1) to the sons of Ulam (2 Chron. 8:40), we must say what Shakespeare said of his lady-love, "When my love walks, she treads upon the ground."

"She treads upon the ground." If we would read the Bible on its own terms, we must needs read it *historically*, which we have tried to do in our traditional Christian education, where the Catechism and Bible History both have retained their place of honor. And we must read it *critically*, if by "critically" we mean with "discriminating appreciation" (Kendrick Grobel, *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "Biblical Criticism" I p. 413a). Basic to such discriminating appreciation would be the capacity to recognize history when one sees it, even when it appears in forms that we should not immediately classify as "historical" in the foot-noted Ph. D. sense of history. I invite you to consider with me three examples of "history" as presented by the Gospel according to Matthew. The first is the genealogy of Jesus as given in Matt. 1:2-17; the second is the survey of Israel's history as given in the

Parable of the Vineyard in Matt. 21:33-43; and the third is Jesus' exclamation as recorded in Matt. 23:37-38:

(37) O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! (38) Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate.

A. Matt. 1:1-17 The Genealogy of Jesus

The RSV translation “the book of the genealogy” (Matt. 1:1) is literal and conceives of the first verse as the title of the genealogy of verses 2-17 only; the genealogy is then thought of as “proof” that Jesus is the Christ, the Fulfiller of the promise given to David (cf. 2 Sam. 7:16; 23:2-5; Ps. 89:3-4). But the words used by Matthew imply more than “the book of the genealogy”; they are an echo of two passages (in the ancient Greek version) of the creation account in Genesis. There the RSV translates, “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 2:4), and “This is the book of the generations of Adam” (Gen. 5:1). In these passages the word “generations” might well be rendered “history of the origin” of the world (Gen. 2:4) and of man (Gen. 5:1). On this understanding, the word translated “genealogy” includes the genealogy of 2-17, of course, but covers the whole history of Jesus, understood as a new Genesis, a new “Let there be light” (Gen. 1:3, cf. Matt. 4:16) by which the blessing promised to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) and to David (2 Sam. 23:3-4) is spoken upon mankind. In this Genesis the history of men will no longer end with the tragic monotony of “And he died” (Gen. 5:5, 8, 11, 14, etc.); man will no longer live as a dead man among dead men (Matt. 8:22), but there will be written over his history the promise, “He shall live.” “Blessing” is the key-signature of this new Genesis; therefore Jesus is designated both as “the son of David” (which would have been sufficient for genealogical “proof”) and as “the son of Abraham,” with whom the history of God’s blessing began (Gen. 12:1-3).

Matthew portrays the history of Israel as consisting of three cycles of fourteen generations each; he omits three names between Joram and Uzziah (9) in order to bring out the fact of God’s control of history. All the history which moves from the time of the small beginnings of Abraham to the glories of the reign of David the King (6), from the full-moon glory of David’s reign to the extinction of Israel’s light and glory in the deportation to Babylon, and from that new-moon darkness to the birth of the Messianic King Jesus—all that history, from its quiet beginning to its inglorious conclusion, moves on the measured paths of God’s providence toward God’s goal of blessing for all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:3).—The last cycle (12-16) contains only thirteen generations; this may be due to the fact that a name has been lost in the copying of the text, or it may be designed to indicate that a generation of sons of Abraham still remains to be completed, that generation which God will raise up as children to Abraham (Matt. 3:9) and inheritance of his

blessing (cf. Gal. 3:14), the generation of those from among all nations who by His grace become son of Abraham by faith in the Son of Abraham (cf. Gal. 3:8-9).

If the history that led to the birth of Jesus who is called Christ is for the glory of His people Israel (cf. Lk. 2:32), it is the glory of God's grace reflected upon Israel that makes Israel glorious. This divine grace that can make light shine out of darkness is emphasized by the fact that the last fourteen generations, which lead to the birth of Jesus, begin in the darkness of the deportation to Babylon (12). And the record of this divine grace is written also in the inclusion of four women (besides Mary, the mother of Our Lord) in the genealogy. The inclusion of women is unusual in Judaic genealogies, and the inclusion of just these four (Tamar, 3; Rahab, 5; Ruth, 6; "the wife of Uriah," 6) is startling. They are not the celebrated mothers of the race (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah); three of them certainly, perhaps all four of them, are not even members of the chosen people; whether the wife of the Hittite, Uriah, could claim membership in Israel is doubtful.

Nor are they all exemplars of virtue: Judah's judgment on Tamar, "She is more righteous than I" (Gen. 38:26) says more about Judah than it does about Tamar, the widowed daughter-in-law who disguised herself as a harlot and conceived twin sons by Judah because he refused to give her the husband whom she rightly claimed from him (Gen. 38:1-19). Rahab was a harlot, as the Biblical record unblushingly declares (Josh. 2:1, cf. Jas. 2:25). And Matthew's designation of Bathsheba as "the wife of Uriah" reflects the judgment which Nathan the prophet pronounced on king David, who attempted to conceal his adultery by contriving the murder of the husband (2 Sam. 12:9). These women stand at key points in Israel's history: Tamar beside Judah, the bearer of the Messianic promise (Gen. 49:10), Rahab at the entry into the promised land (Josh. 2 and 6), and Bathsheba as wife of king David and mother of his successor Solomon; these women are witnesses to the long-suffering mercy of the God who implanted His Son and Messiah in a family of mixed ancestry and of dubious morality in order to "save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

B. Matt. 21:33-43 The Parable of the Vineyard

"Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht" (Schiller) has been said of history generally; the same can be said of the history of Israel, the people of Abraham and Jesus, as Matthew portrays it in the genealogy of his first chapter, if we read it, historically-critically, as his dark preface to the bright gospel of the Virgin Birth, God's splendid Nevertheless to the grim history of Israel's failure and death.

The Parable of the Vineyard is in Matthew the second of three parables spoken by Jesus during His last week in Jerusalem: the Parable of the Two Sons (21:28-32), the Parable of the Vineyard (21:33-46), and the Parable of the Marriage Feast (22:1-14). All three of the parables speak of God as taking

the initiative, an initiative of grace: God is the Father who bids His sons, "Go and work in the vineyard today" (21:28); He is the Householder who plants the vineyard, lets it out to tenant-farmers, and bids His tenant give Him the fruit due to Him (21:33-34). God is the King who gives a marriage feast for His Son, invites the already-bidden guests, avenges Himself on the despisers of His invitation, and fills the wedding hall with guests in spite of all, and it is He who executes judgment on the guest who comes, contemptuously, to the wedding in his dirty clothes (22:1-14). Jesus spreads before the eyes of Israel a picture of the grace that has made the sons of Israel God's sons, God's trusted tenant-workmen, God's invited wedding-guests; and He makes Israel aware of the high sanctity of the love which has made them God's sons, God's workmen, and God's wedding-guests.

Likewise Jesus pictures the response of God's people as an ingrate, graceless response. The two sons respond either with an outright "I will not" (21:29) or with a glib, meaningless "I go, sir" (21:30)—it is the scum of Israel, the tax collectors and the harlots, who go into the kingdom of God (21:32). The history of the workmen in the vineyard is a record of violent and selfish revolt; they maltreat and kill both God's messengers and God's Son (21:35-39). Those invited to the wedding-feast of the king's Son make light of the king's invitation and go about their business—or kill the king's messengers (22:5-6). Even among the guests at the wedding feast is found one who presumes upon the king's invitation and comes "as he is" (22:11-13), assuming that man in his everyday dirtiness is good enough for God.

Both "the kindness and the severity of God" (Rom. 11:22) are revealed in God's response to the actions of His sons, His workmen, and His guests. The severity of God: the sons forfeit their place in His vineyard; the faithless tenant-workmen are threatened with "a miserable death" (41); the guests who refused His invitation to the feast feel the fury of the king, who "sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city" (22:7), while the man "who had no wedding garment" is, at the king's command, bound hand and foot and cast into outer darkness (22:13).

But if His severity is a terrible, a thing to make men weep and gnash their teeth, His kindness is an incredible miracle. His love goes out to the tax collectors and harlots whose sole merit is that they repented and believed him who came "in the way of righteousness" (21:32). The tenant-workmen will be put to a miserable death as they have deserved, but the way into the vineyard is opened "to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their season" (21:41). The invited wedding-guests are excluded; but God prowls the streets and gathers in "both bad and good" and so the wedding hall is filled with guests (21:10).

The Parable of the Vineyard begins with an echo of Isaiah; Isaiah had caught the attention of his hearers (perhaps at an autumn harvest festival) with words that recalled a love song:

Let me sing for my beloved
a love song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.
He digged it and cleared it of stones.
and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watch tower in the midst of it,
and he hewed out a wine vat in it. (Isa. 5:1-2)

The innocent “love song” soon gets an ominous ring when Isaiah says,

And he looked for it to yield good grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes. (Isa. 5:2)

and calls upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah to judge between the Lord and His vineyard:

Judge, I pray you, between me
and my vineyard.
What more was there to do for my vineyard,
that I have not done in it?
When I looked for it to yield grapes,
why did it yield wild grapes? (Isa. 5:3-4)

Isaiah then goes on to threaten judgment upon His vineyard, the house of Israel and the men of Judah, that had repaid His careful planting and lovingly laborious care with bloodshed (*mishpach*) where justice (*mishpat*) was to grow and with the cry (*zeakah*) of the oppressed where the Lord had planned to rear righteousness (*zedekah*) (Isa. 5:5-7).

Jesus in His parable echoes and suggests the Lord's lost love for His vineyard, the vine that He had brought out of Egypt (Ps. 80:8), but He concentrates on the *keepers* of the vineyard, the tenants to whom the Lord let out the vineyard He had planted and tended. Twice He sent servants “to get his fruit.” The men of Israel to whom Jesus spoke His parable would recognize the prophets in the Lord's “servants”, and the “fruits” might be summed up in the words of Micah:

He has showed you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?
(Mic. 6:8, cf. Mt. 23:23)

Jesus' picture of Israel's history is in part a record of the past and in part a prediction of the immediately impending future, His own passion, death, and resurrection, and the history that lies beyond, the history of the nations to whom the vineyard will be let, who will give God His fruits in their season. He makes a major division between the sending of the prophets (two waves) and the sending of the Son (37). It is the same division as that made in the

Letter to the Hebrews: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers, by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son." (Heb. 1:1-2) And after the manner of Isaiah (Isa. 5:3-4) He bids His hearers themselves pass judgment on the men who kill the Son and thrust Him from the vineyard: "When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to these tenants?" (Matt. 21:40). They are compelled to pronounce the annihilating verdict on themselves (Matt. 21:41); it is Jesus who carries the history onward, beyond the fate of the ungrateful tenants to the marvelous sequel of the stone which the builders rejected that will become the head of the corner, the Lord's doing (Ps. 118:22-23), the history of a nation who will produce the fruits of the kingdom of God given to it (Matt. 21:42-43).

C. Matt. 23:37-38: "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!"

The same song of lost love rings in the word of Jesus over a people on whom He pronounced the verdict, "Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers" (Matt. 23:32). He stood ready to die for them that "would not"; for Jerusalem, "killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you!" The judgment of God will make the house which they sought to make their house, the place where *their* honor dwells (cf. Mt. 21:38), "forsaken and desolate," void of the glad worshipers of God. But even for them the Jesus' love paints a future filled with voices of joyously believing acclamation: "I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" (Matt. 23:39; Ps. 118:26)

"They will respect my son" (Matt. 21:37). That was the hope that lived in the heart of God when He sent His Son as Successor to and Culminator of His servants the prophets (Matt. 21:37). That same expectancy hovers over us today as we ask ourselves the question, "How shall we, as faithful followers of Jesus, read our Bible?" What hope shall we bring to it, with what expectations shall we approach it? Where is the source of that serene confidence that made its "It is written" a power that carried Jesus through His temptation and through the agony of His passion and made "Have you not read?" a strong weapon in His hand? How shall we respect the Son of God on this vital point and gain the power which He has promised?

We shall read the Bible historically if we would read it as the Son read it and triumphed for us all. We shall have tasted His words in vain if we have not sensed the living sap of history running through them all, as I have attempted, briefly, to show. And we shall have dwelt with the words of His apostles and evangelists in vain, too, unless they intoxicate us with the living juices of history that flow in them, if the best we can do is to extract from them "timeless truths," remote from history, blanched and bleached propositions.

"They will respect my son." We shall not be respecting the Son of God unless we are prepared to read the Bible *critically*. Now, the word "critical"

is a slippery one and is variously interpreted in modern times. Kendrick Grobel defines “Biblical criticism” as “discriminating appreciation,” while Peter Brunner points up the secularized sense imposed by “historical-critical” with the remark, “In an historical-critical study there can be no sentence whose subject is God.” If we would respect the Son of God, there can be no doubt about which definition we should use; if we retain the word “critical” at all, we retain it in the sense “discriminating appreciation”, that appreciation of the Word of God which we learn from Our Lord Himself. He through whom the Law was written in the human heart could deal in sovereign freedom with the Law (Matt. 5:21-43); He could meet the devil’s audacious use of a promise of God (Matt. 4:5-6) with an obedient Son’s, “*Again it is written*, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God’” (Matt. 4:7). He could meet the Pharisees’ citation of the Law of Moses concerning the certificate of divorce (Matt. 19:7, Dt. 24:1-4) with “From the beginning it was not so” (Matt. 19:8), leading men back to the primal splendor of Creation, which He was come to restore (Matt. 4:16-17).

“Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation,” we sing of a Sunday morning as we “proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26), by eating the body and drinking the blood which He gave us. Let us learn that joy again; let us learn it of Him who sang the Hallel (Pss. 113-118) on the night in which He was betrayed.

MARTIN H. FRANZMANN

THE CHURCH UNDER THE SCRIPTURES

In his inimitable fashion, Dr. Martin Luther writes in the Smalcald Articles: "Thank God, a seven-year old child knows what the church is, namely, holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd" (SA, III, xii, 2). Many Christians today, although presumably wiser than the seven-year olds of Luther's day, have considerable difficulty understanding and applying these words of Luther which simply but aptly describe the church under the Scriptures. We can safely assume that all Christians will claim to belong to the church and to be under the Scriptures. Just as Christian critics of ecclesiastical institutions usually stop short of condemning the church itself, so even those who take issue with the Scriptures generally want to avoid the suggestion that they are not "under" the Scriptures. But what does it mean to be "church"? What does it mean to be "under the Scriptures"? Is a church body really "under" the Scriptures if its members are free to approach the Scriptures much as they would any other book and even to disagree with what the Scriptures teach? In a church body under the Scriptures, how much disagreement, diversity and division can properly be tolerated without disrupting fellowship? Such questions call for much prayerful study, reflection, and discussion. It is hoped that the following paragraphs will contribute to that end by summarizing major accents and emphases of the Holy Scriptures and our Lutheran confessional writings on such questions.¹ The three major parts focus on the following concepts and relationships: Church and Gospel, Scripture and Doctrine, and Fellowship and Separation.

CHURCH AND GOSPEL

1. *The church in the narrow or proper sense is the "assembly of believers"* (AC VII). It is "mainly an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (Ap VII, 5) and not merely an "association of outward ties and rites". The great truth that the church is constituted by faith was articulated by Luther and his colleagues in the 16th century not only because of the polemical situation of that time, that is, to enable Luther to say in the Smalcald Articles, "We do not concede to the papists that they are the church, for they are not" (III, xii, 1). Much more, this understanding of the church as constituted by faith in Jesus Christ and not by membership in an external organization, follows from the great Apostolic and Reformation truth that man is justified by faith. Just as it is only by faith in Jesus Christ (or, the Gospel in the narrow sense) that a man is righteous in the sight of God, so the church is simply the totality of those who have such faith. The church is the Body of Christ because it has a living relationship with Him who is its Head. Apart from a living relationship with

the Head, there is no living relationship with other members of the Body (Ap VII, 5). Apart from faith, there is no church. Just as faith alone justifies, so also faith alone constitutes the church. What this means dare not be overlooked! It is not our membership in any congregation or denomination that makes us “church”. The church, properly speaking, is the community of all those, and only those, in whom the Holy Spirit has created saving faith in Jesus Christ. It is therefore not coextensive with any denominational structure or structures. Its reality is *spiritual*, for it is constituted by *faith*. The precise limits of the church in the narrow sense cannot be determined by man, nor can its extent be measured statistically, organizationally, or sociologically; for only God Himself knows who truly believes in Him through Jesus Christ.

2. *The church is called and recognized by the use of the Gospel and Sacraments.* The church is GOD's creation. Because we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him, the Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel and enlightens us with His gifts. When the Gospel is communicated or the sacraments are used² God does miraculous things! The Holy Spirit works through these instruments to make saints out of sinners by creating faith in Jesus Christ. When He creates faith, He places the faithful into a community called the church. The church is people, not a mere intellectual abstraction. For the means through which the church is *called* is also the means by which it is *recognized*. So great is our confidence in God the Holy Spirit's operation through the Gospel and sacraments that we know that the church exists wherever His means are employed. Thus, to find or recognize the church, our confessions urge us to look neither for great programs, many buildings, and large and elaborate organizations, nor even for purity of life or excellency of love—important as all of these may be—but rather ask us to look for the pure and right use of the Gospel and sacraments. This emphasis honors God as the Author of the church and recognizes the church as His creation, rather than our own. It takes seriously God's promise that His Word will not return to Him void but will accomplish His purpose (Isaiah 55:11).

3. *The church is united spiritually; its unity is given with faith in the Gospel.* We confess in the Nicene Creed: I believe in ONE, holy, Christian and apostolic church. Properly speaking, there are not 250 churches in America, but ONE church. We are one with every Christian who lives or has ever lived on the face of this earth. Christian unity is nothing other than the spiritual bond that unites all believers to their Lord Jesus Christ and thereby to each other. There is only one assembly of such believers in both space and time. *Ubi ecclesia, ibi unitas*, our fathers said: “Where the church is, there is its unity.” When the Augsburg Confession states in its Seventh Article, “For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments”, the confession is not

in the first instance making a programmatic statement about our modern ecumenical problem.³ To quote from the *Apology*, it is rather describing “true spiritual unity, without which there can be no faith in the heart nor righteousness in the heart before God” (Ap. VII, 31). Unity is there correlated with faith and righteousness—*spiritual* realities rather than empirical objects. Such unity is found where the Gospel and sacraments are used purely and rightly, that is, where they are in the first instance, *qualitatively* pure and right, where the Gospel is preached and the sacraments are used without pollution and contamination by human additions or subtractions or by legalistic admixtures. For it is only through the pure Gospel that God creates the one and only church of Jesus Christ.

In this connection it will be helpful to distinguish between the unity *of* the church (which all believers *have* with each other) and unity *in* the church (which believers seek). Our fathers frequently used the term *concordia* (concord) when referring to the latter, and *unitas* (unity) when speaking of the former.⁴

4. *The church in the narrow sense is found only within the church in the broad sense.* Where do we find this one church of believers only? The confessions answer: only in a larger assembly of people including hypocrites and unbelievers who for various reasons are gathered around the Word and sacraments together with the true believers. The confessions call this assembly the “association of outward ties and rights” (Ap VII, 5), or the church in the broad sense. The hypocrites and unbelievers in this assembly are not living members of the body of Christ but are only what the *Apology* calls “members of the church according to the outward associations of the church’s marks” (Ap VII, 3), or “as far as outward ceremonies are concerned” (Ap. VII, 12). The church in this broad sense *can* be measured and described empirically and sociologically. Membership lists and statistical yearbooks can be compiled on it. But it bears the name “church” only because of the true church within it. It too is identified by the use of Gospel and sacraments carried on in its midst and which continue to retain their divine power and efficacy even when done by unbelievers. This is not a second church, for there is only one church. But the one church of true believers—real people, not some Platonic idea or mere intellectual abstraction—exists within the broad church and is not simply coextensive with it. But it is the church in the broad sense that is in fact the normal identification of the word “church” today. In other words, we recognize that our congregations and our synod are not made up exclusively of believers, and therefore are not simply coextensive with “church” in the proper sense.

5. *The external unity of the church in the broad sense is to be based on agreement in the purely taught Gospel and the rightly administered sacraments, that is, in “doctrine and in all its articles as well as in the right use of*

the holy sacraments" (*FC, Ep, X, 7*). While unity is a "given" of the church in the proper sense, it is also a *goal* for the church in the broad sense, the "association of outward ties and rites". The Augsburg Confession was written not only to establish the fact that the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church was present among Luther's followers, but to help restore an outward unity that had been lost. The Preface of the AC states this purpose very clearly, namely, "to have all of us embrace and adhere to a single, true religion and live together in unity and in one fellowship and church, even as we are all enlisted under one Christ" (AC Preface, 4). Such outward unity is dependent on agreement in the Gospel and use of the sacraments according to Christ's institution. We are here talking about agreement in the Gospel in the broad sense, that is, about doctrine and all its articles.⁵ Why is such agreement necessary?

One can answer that question simply by observing that Christians want to be faithful and obedient to their Lord who commanded His church to "obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19, TEV), and whose Holy Prophets, Evangelists, and Apostles exhort us in many places to uphold sound doctrine (more on this below).

But there is also a "Gospel" reason for seeking agreement in doctrine and all its articles. And that is the fact that the Gospel in the narrow sense (that is, the "Good News" of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our salvation) is integrally related to *all* articles of faith. As the fathers often said, they are either antecedent or consequent to the doctrine of justification by grace. The Gospel in the narrow sense is central and primary within "doctrine and all its articles", and all articles of faith have a direct or indirect bearing on the Gospel in the narrow sense.⁶ Because of this relationship, the denial or falsification of any article of faith seriously injures the preaching of the Gospel according to a pure understanding of it.

It should be noted that the Augsburg Confession in Article VII calls for a Gospel that is *purely* taught and for Sacraments that are *rightly* administered. These adverbs not only describe *qualitative* purity, but have *quantitative* significance as well; for the Gospel through which the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, and enlightens His Church, ultimately embraces all articles of faith revealed in Holy Scripture.

In this connection, it should be observed that agreement in the Gospel, in all its articles, does *not* mean that "human traditions or rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be alike everywhere" (AC, VII). Uniformity in ceremonies may be useful, but ceremonies not ordained by God have no organic connection with the Gospel and are therefore not criteria for the external unity of the church. But the antithesis in AC VII is between the *divine* Gospel and *human* ceremonies, and not between the Gospel and "other" teachings of Holy Scripture.

6. *Only such external unity as preserves and employs the means of grace in*

their essential purity serves the true unity, preservation, and extension of the church. The Holy Spirit builds the church through the Gospel and sacraments. Believing, teaching, and confessing the Gospel according to Holy Scripture becomes the one essential task of the church and the one God-given means for seeking and finding true Christian unity. In other words, the primary mission of the church can be described as the faithful use of the means of grace. External unity in the church is not an end in itself, but serves the primary task of the church. *Concordia* (that is, concord, external unity, or unity *in* the church) is intended to deepen and extend *unitas* (that is, true spiritual unity, or the unity *of* the church), and this is done only when the Gospel is faithfully preserved and consistently employed. Therefore, we cannot automatically assume that the formation of denominations, organizational mergers, participation in church federations, or even ecclesiastical declarations of altar and pulpit fellowship in themselves advance the cause of true Christian unity, for the decisive criterion remains whether such actions advance and are faithful to the Gospel. According to this criterion, not every separation of Christians from other Christians is to be condemned (however much it is deplored), for God Himself commands separation from all alliances that persistently falsify His Gospel, or tolerate such falsification.

To summarize: The church in the narrow sense, which consists of believers in Jesus Christ, is united spiritually by its common faith in the Gospel in the narrow sense, but exists within the church in the broad sense whose external unity is to be based on agreement in the Gospel in the broad sense. The Gospel in the narrow sense is related to all aspects of the Gospel in the broad sense, and is the means by which the Holy Spirit creates and extends the church. The church under the Scriptures is therefore constituted by and committed to the pure teaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments.

SCRIPTURE AND DOCTRINE

But how is the Church to make sure that it is teaching and preaching the Gospel “purely” and administering the sacraments “rightly”? That question is not unique for our church body nor for our modern age. Christians of all ages have been confronted with a variety of “doctrines” and “gospels” as well as a wide assortment of theories about the sacraments. Since the church has the divine mandate to use the Gospel and sacraments *purely* and *rightly* as the means by which God the Holy Spirit creates, nourishes, preserves, and extends His church, the church not only may but *must* be actively concerned about the “purely” and “rightly” of its use of Word and Sacraments.

Scripture is the Voice of the Shepherd

How is the church to do this? Left to its own limited and sinful resources,

is the church *able* to do it? The answer lies in recalling with Luther that the church is “sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd” (SA, III, xii, 2). Where do the sheep hear the voice of their Shepherd? Luther put it this way:

Holy Scripture is the book given by God the Holy Spirit to His church. From this book the church learns what the church is, what the church must do, what the church must suffer, where the church should abide. Where this book ceases, there the church ceases. For He [Jesus] says: His church will not listen to the voice of strangers.⁷

In other words, Holy Scripture is the voice of the Shepherd by which the church, as His sheep, learns to preach, teach, and administer His Gospel and sacraments “purely and rightly”. It is for that reason that the church knows itself to be “under the Scriptures” and acknowledges them as the written Word of God and as “the only judge, rule, and norm according to which, as the only touchstone, all doctrines should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong” (FC, Ep, Rule and Norm, 7). It is because the church recognizes that her very existence is dependent upon the voice of the Shepherd, and not the voice of strangers, that the church rejects whatever calls into question the authority or truthfulness of the Bible.

There should be little need at this point to remind the members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod of its oft-repeated position that Holy Scripture is the very Word of God, and that as such it is absolutely true and reliable in everything it says. Such has been the conviction of our church body from its beginning. The pages of our Lutheran confessional writings, like those of Luther himself, almost overflow with the recognition that Scripture is *God* speaking, and that when He speaks the church listens. This attitude of our fathers toward the Scriptures was not some outmoded tradition they were unable to discard because they lacked the modern tools to do so. No, their attitude toward Scripture reflects not only their acceptance of what the Scripture says about itself, but their understanding of the role the Scriptures are to play in helping the church to use the Gospel and Sacraments “purely and rightly”.

Holy Scripture in Lutheran Theology

It is important to understand and articulate correctly the role the Holy Scriptures play in Lutheran theology. It can be argued, and argued correctly, that the church is to be under the Scriptures simply as an act of human obedience and reverence to God Himself. Since God Himself is the Author of Scripture, Christians are simply obliged under the First Commandment to let God be God, also in His Word. Such an emphasis is good and proper, and it can remind the church that every trifling with or disdain for the Word of God is an act of pride and rebellion against God Himself. With this emphasis, we can and should condemn every denial of Scriptural truth as wrong simply because it is an act of disobedience against God Himself.

But there is another way of articulating the role of Biblical authority in the life of the church, and that is to see that the primary function of the Scriptures in the life of the church is to serve as the God-given source and norm for the church's life-giving use of Word and Sacraments. For the confessions, it is self-evident that the norm for determining what is "pure" preaching of the Gospel and "right" administration of the sacraments is the Word of God, Holy Scripture. Whatever is faithful to Holy Scripture serves the Gospel, and whatever opposes Holy Scripture threatens the Gospel. An external fellowship in which the Bible's authority or truthfulness is denied or minimized jeopardizes the Gospel, for the testimony of the Scriptures is the God-spun fabric from which all articles of faith are woven. Recognition of the divine authority of Holy Scripture is a fruit of faith in the Gospel, but the *Biblical* content of the Gospel we preach and administer is in turn our assurance that our Gospel comes from *God* and therefore expresses *His* will and possesses *His* power.⁸

With this understanding of Biblical authority, every denial of Biblical truth and every method of approaching the Scriptures as though they were a purely human book, is to be condemned not only as an act of disobedience against God, but as a threat or injury to the very means God has given to create, sustain, and extend His church—namely, the pure proclamation of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments. Neither impurity nor error enhance the Gospel or build the church of Jesus Christ.

Warning Against "Enthusiasm"

It is in this context that we must understand why Luther and the confessional writings warn so strenuously against "enthusiasm" or "Schwaermerei", that is, the notion that God gives His Holy Spirit *apart* from the external Word. There are many forms of "enthusiasm", as Luther's words reveal, but *any* claim to hear God's voice apart from His Word falls under Luther's condemnation. Reminding us that our first parents were "enthusiasts" when they listened to another voice than God's, Luther emphasizes that enthusiasm "is the source, strength, and power of all heresy" (SA, III, viii, 9ff.).

Whenever the church substitutes its own ideas (even under the presumption that it is being guided by the Holy Spirit), or appeals to its own intuitive reading of the times, or devises its "gospel" on the basis of its own understanding of a particular situation or time, or treats the Gospel of Jesus Christ as though it were a free-floating idea, rather than what we learn it to be from the Scriptures, or claims to find the meaning of the Gospel above, beyond, or behind the clear text of Scripture—in *all* such cases, the church has ceased to be *under* the Scriptures and has fallen victim to "enthusiasm". We need to be reminded that subjective human ideas, like human works, may well endanger the Gospel itself. No, God has given us His inspired and inerrant Scriptures, with their central witness to Jesus Christ and eternal salvation, not as end in itself, but as *His* way of freeing our proclamation, witness, and

theology from the pitfalls and dangers of a purely human determination of what the content of His Gospel and sacraments really is.

For us who are in Christ Jesus, there can be no question of asking God to meet us on our own terms. We know where that road ends. The new life in Christ is one of joyful obedience, trust, and submission in faith. It is a life determined and shaped by the radical nature of God's creative gift in Christ. It is within the sphere of that new life that our commitment to Scripture arises. This commitment is for us not so much a matter of decision and proof as of submission, for it is part and parcel of the new life which gives up all pride and boasting. The Christ in whom we have found new life is the Christ of the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures, the Christ who bids us to observe whatever He has commanded through His prophets and apostles. We have no other Christ, we know no other, and indeed we seek no other. We accept Him through the words of those who bear witness to Him by the special inspiration of His Spirit. In accepting Him, we accept the testimony *about* Him that is Holy Scripture, and we also accept what that testimony says about itself, namely, that it is the very Word of God for our faith and life.

Biblical Authority Serves Our Proclamation

Our acceptance of Holy Scripture as God's authoritative Word is essential to our ministry of proclamation. For, since it is the Christ of the Scriptures whom we proclaim, anything less than a total commitment to the truth of those Scriptures may come to endanger our proclamation. Please note carefully what we are *not* claiming here. We do not claim that such total commitment to Holy Scripture is necessary for saving faith to exist, nor do we identify saving faith and the acceptance of Holy Scripture. Nor do we claim that such commitment will inevitably result in the pure preaching of the Gospel and the correct administration of the sacraments. What we claim is that a less-than-complete commitment to the Scriptures, an uncertainty about their truthfulness, a hesitancy or disagreement with regard to some of their contents, or a way of interpreting them that makes open questions out of apostolic teachings, will endanger the proclamation of the Gospel. For the Scriptures are the epistemological foundation (i. e., the "formal principle") on which our proclamation and theology rest.

Our complete commitment to the Scriptures is not, therefore, intended to provide a false certainty for faith. In the realm of personal, existential *faith* we have, know, and seek no other object of faith than the Christ of the Scriptures. In the realm of our public *proclamation* we have, know, and seek no gospel other than the Gospel to which the Scriptures bear witness and which they norm. Thus, our commitment to the Scriptures is not only the direct result of faith in Christ, but an integral part of our ecumenical concern for the whole church and, indeed, for all mankind. We are concerned that the Christ whom we proclaim is neither a figment of our imaginations nor a result of selective picking and choosing, but simply the Christ to whom the Prophets

and Apostles bear witness. The Scriptures are the foundation of our proclamation. Anything less than total commitment to them may well be a reflection of man's perennial tendency to repeat the Tempter's question, "Yes, hath God said?"—a question that always jeopardizes the proclamation of the Gospel to which God has called us, and through which "He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith" (SC, Creed, 6).

All Scripture is Important

It is for this reason that *all* the content of the Bible is important. Not every statement in the Scriptures needs to be regarded as an article of faith, but the truthfulness and authority of *every* statement in the Scriptures needs to be acknowledged, simply because it is the very Word of God Himself. Dr. C. F. W. Walther, the first president of our church body, taught us that important truth more than one hundred years ago. He wrote:

If, in a doctrinal controversy, the dispute is about doctrines which do not belong to the articles of faith, everything depends for us on whether those who contradict show that they do so because they do not want to submit to the Word of God, and therefore on whether, while appearing to let the basic doctrines of the Word of God stand, they nevertheless overthrow the very foundation upon which all these doctrines rest: the Word of God.⁹

We may illustrate this concern with several examples. There are teachings of Scripture, and important ones, which we do not usually term articles of faith. For example, the Scriptures clearly teach that man has been given dominion over the rest of creation, a teaching which many would not consider part of the doctrine of the Gospel, but which is of great significance for a proper understanding of man and his relationship to his environment. On biblical warrant, we believe that man is to be understood in this manner, and we would have to question seriously the acceptance of any scientific or philosophical viewpoint which denied this significant relationship between human and other biological life.

Or we might point to the order of marriage as another example. Here again we have a highly significant teaching of Scripture which is not usually considered an article of faith. In fellowship concerns, to be sure, we do not begin by discussing the order of marriage. But it would become significant for such discussions if brethren appear to espouse a view which calls into question the biblical understanding of this order. If such is the case, we must ask the Scriptural warrant for such views. And there again, no utilitarian or historical considerations will suffice. A third illustration of this point would be various Biblical statements which in themselves are not articles of faith, such as Jesus' references to Himself as the Son of Man. We accept such references without question. But if others question Jesus' identification of himself with the Son of Man, we should have to question whether such an approach to

the Scriptures is consistent with the proper recognition of its authority. In such cases, our commitment to Scripture plays an important role in fellowship concerns.

When any Scriptural teachings, whether articles of faith or not, are denied or ignored, we must ask for the Scriptural warrant for such action. Matters clearly taught in the Scriptures can never be regarded as open questions, whether articles of faith or not. Nor do they become “open” by pointing out that Scripture appears to talk in different ways or point in different directions (a fact which might be claimed as easily for the doctrine of justification as for any other Scriptural teaching). For something to be an open question, what must be shown is that Scripture itself points to no resolution of the difficulty and that there is no more reason (on the basis of Scripture) to espouse one position than the other. No, the church *under* the Scriptures is concerned when *any* teachings of the Scriptures are denied, treated indifferently, or forgotten, lest this be evidence of undermining the authority of God’s Word—an act which always endangers the proclamation of the Gospel itself. At that point, God’s Word does not permit any compromise.

The Historical-Critical Approach

Similarly, the church *under* Scripture does not approach any of the Scriptures with a method that is not suited to, or is even opposed to, the character of Holy Scripture as the Word of God. Such a method is the “historical-critical” method. As “historical criticism” is normally understood today, it does *not* merely mean that the Bible must be read in its “historical” setting and that the “critical” faculties of the interpreter must be used to distinguish between grammatical and linguistic alternatives—something no orthodox interpreter of the Scripture would even question. No, “historical criticism” identifies a way of interpreting the Bible, common since the Enlightenment, which treats the Bible as though it were precisely like any other human literature. Such a method cannot be regarded as a neutral tool in the hands of the interpreter, for it clearly is not a method suited either to the revelational character of Scripture or to the posture of the church *under* the Scriptures which regards them as true in every respect.¹⁰

Importance of “Doctrine” and Doctrinal Agreement

From all that has been said about the proper relationship between Scripture, Gospel, and Church, it is readily apparent why the Church under Scripture is concerned about “doctrine”, and why our confessions, hymns, prayers, and synodical literature are filled with references to “pure doctrine”.¹¹ Scripture itself exhorts us in many ways, and throughout both Old and New Testaments, to hold fast to good, sound, pure, and right doctrine, and conversely, to oppose, resist, and avoid false doctrines and false teachers. One has only to read the Pastoral Epistles to be reminded of this fact. Such injunctions occur not only because Christians owe obedience and acceptance

to Biblical doctrine as coming from God, but also because “pure doctrine” is God’s way of keeping our proclamation and explication of Law and Gospel uncontaminated by elements that do not build and preserve the church.¹² Thus, “doctrine” is not some third entity in addition to “Gospel” and “Scripture” to which the church is related; it is rather the Scriptural articulation of the Gospel in all its articles.

The church under Scripture seeks full *doctrinal* agreement as the basis for fellowship between its members. For it knows that doctrine is in all its articles related to the Gospel by which the church lives, moves, and has its being. It therefore opposes both minimalistic and pluralistic doctrinal approaches to establishing and maintaining external unity in the church. The former occurs in the appeal to practice ecclesiastical fellowship simply on the basis of a declaration of the Lordship of Christ, the “simple” Gospel, a Trinitarian statement, the fact of Baptism, or perhaps membership in a nominally Christian church.¹³ As Lutherans, we must be particularly careful that AC VII is not misused in this way, as though the requirements for membership and unity in the *una sancta*, the church in the narrow sense, are a sufficient requirement for external unity or fellowship in the church in the broad sense. Closely related is the pluralistic assertion, so common in ecumenical literature, that many doctrinal positions can exist side by side within the same fellowship without disrupting the fellowship. Under the impact of the historical-critical approach to Scripture, it has become fashionable to claim that alleged doctrinal diversity and contradiction within the Scriptures legitimize and even necessitate doctrinal diversity within the church. Both the minimalistic and the pluralistic positions reflect an indifferentism to revealed doctrine that dishonors God’s Word, weakens the Gospel that sustains the church and its true unity, offends the brethren, and ultimately promotes the external disunity of the churches. Such positions, often predicated on an inadequate notion of Christian love, serve the cause of neither love nor truth. Love demands that our brother be served by truth rather than by error, because error leads away from Jesus Christ, not toward Him. Doctrinal indifference ultimately destroys true Christian unity and produces schism, division, and polarization within Christendom. Granted that the divided state of Christendom is a serious offense, it must be understood that doctrinal indifference or laxity not only does nothing to remove real barriers to fellowship, but creates an additional offense.

The church under Scriptures also recognizes the importance of practice as the application of doctrine to life. Proper formulations of the meaning of the Gospel on the basis of the Scriptures, necessary as such formulations are, are no substitute for actually preaching, teaching, and living the Gospel and using the sacraments. Practice is a fair indication of fidelity to the Gospel. For example, it does little good to have a correct understanding and formulation of the doctrine of the divine call to the Office of the Holy Ministry if in fact called ministers set aside or walk away from their called responsibilities.

It helps little to have a correct doctrinal understanding of the Eighth Commandment if the members of the church do not apply it in their dealings with one another. To have a fine formulation of the doctrine of the church, but to carry out divisive and schismatic activities within the church, is hardly descriptive of "sound doctrine". We need to remember that the Augsburg Confession (VII) is talking about a Gospel that is actually taught, proclaimed, and lived, and about sacraments that are actually administered. Why? Because it is through the practice of the Gospel, if you will, that the Holy Spirit creates and sustains His church. To be sure, not all items in the area of practice are clearly defined in the Word of God, and this needs to be recognized. But where they are, or where they clearly relate to the Gospel, there can be no retreat to the safety of written formulations at the expense of what is actually happening in the church's parishes as well as its seminaries, colleges, publishing houses, boards and commissions. As our fathers emphasized, unity in the church can be seriously impaired or vitiated by a life or practice that is inconsistent with the doctrine that is professed.

To summarize: The church is constituted, nourished, preserved and extended by the pure preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the sacraments. God has given the Scriptures to the church to keep its preaching, teaching, use of the sacraments, and life faithful to the Gospel. Therefore, the church consciously stands *under* the Scriptures and rejects all false approaches to the Scripture as jeopardizing the proclamation of the Gospel. For that reason, the church should accept *all* doctrine taught in the Scripture and avoid any association or action which would weaken or falsify "pure doctrine".

FELLOWSHIP AND SEPARATION

The church under the Scriptures carries out its tasks and expresses its fellowship with Christ and with one another primarily through congregations. Congregations frequently unite to form church bodies or denominations. Church bodies, in turn, frequently form associations with other denominations or ecclesiastical groups. A church body by its very nature is a community of faith that seeks not only to nourish and preserve itself, but to embrace other Christians and share with them the task of bringing the message of Christ to the world through the Word and sacraments. In The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, we usually speak of church bodies who recognize that they are in doctrinal agreement as being "in fellowship".¹⁴ Because such "fellowship" is predicated upon doctrinal agreement, our church body has consistently rejected as "unionism" any expression of fellowship that ignores genuine differences in doctrine or treats them as though they were unimportant. Moreover, our Synod has consistently recognized that according to the Scriptures church fellowship between Christians can be broken by certain errors and abuses. Luther reminds us that in the church we not only feed the

lambs, but “guard against wolves so that they will flee from strange voices and separate the precious from the vile” (Quoted in FC, SD, Rule and Norm, 14).

Diversity Within the Church

This is not to say that church bodies ever reach perfection in their quest to be faithful to the Word of God, nor does it mean that there can be no diversity within a confessional church body. Our confessions make a sharp distinction between “unprofitable contentions” and “necessary controversy”, and describe the latter as “dissension concerning articles of the Creed or the chief parts of our Christian doctrine, when the contrary error must be refuted in order to preserve the truth” (FC, SD, Rule and Norm, 15). The later confessors were careful not to condemn either “those persons who err ingenuously and who do not blaspheme the truth of the divine Word” or “entire churches inside or outside the Holy Empire of the German Nation” (Preface to Book of Concord, p. 11). The Apology of the Augsburg Confession can even acknowledge that “perishing structures of stubble, that is, unprofitable opinions” have been built on the foundation of Christ and faith, and that these are forgiven or corrected “because they do not overthrow the foundation” (Ap, VII, 20). In view of such statements, it is important for the church of today to base the establishment and continuation of church fellowship on agreement in doctrine, and not on uniformity in human ceremonies, traditions, or rites (AC VII).

However, such statements in the confessional writings never have as their purpose to suggest that any teachings of Scripture can be ignored, denied, or falsified. Nor do they suggest that any doctrinal errors, even among the ingenuous, should long be tolerated in the church of God. “It is furthermore to be hoped”, states the Preface to the Book of Concord, “that when they are rightly instructed in this doctrine, they will, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, turn to the infallible truth of the divine Word and unite with us and our churches and schools”. Moreover, our confessional fathers solemnly remind theologians and ministers of their responsibility “duly to remind even those who err ingenuously and ignorantly of the danger to their souls and to warn them against it, lest one blind person let himself be misled by another” (Preface to Book of Concord, p. 12). In fact, all of us have the obligation to confess the true doctrine, as the Formula states:

We believe, teach, and confess that at a time of confession, as when enemies of the Word of God desire to suppress the pure doctrine of the holy Gospel, the entire community of God, yes, every individual Christian, and especially the ministers of the Word as the leaders of the community of God, are obligated to confess openly, not only by words but also through their deeds and actions, the true doctrine and all that pertains to it, according to the Word of God. (FC, SD, X, 10)

Such confession, as the record of confessional history shows, sometimes took the form of separation from those Christians who remained in error.

Safeguarding the Fellowship

Because the church is created, nourished, preserved, and extended by the power of the Holy Spirit through the pure preaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments, Christians are called upon to safeguard their fellowship in every way. How does the church do this? Let us recall how our Synod has answered this question in the past. The *Theology of Fellowship*, accepted by the Synod in 1967, states:

A Christian's fellowship with God in Christ as well as his fellowship with other Christians is an exceedingly great and precious possession (1 John 3:13, 14; Eph. 4:1-6). For this reason Satan constantly strives to disrupt this fellowship by every means at his disposal. Therefore it is necessary for the church to safeguard this fellowship in every way.

This the church does—

1. *By remaining steadfastly under the power of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament* (Acts 2:42; Rom. 6:3-5; Gal. 3:26-28; 1 Cor. 12:13; 1 Cor. 10:16, 17; 1 Cor. 11:26), since Christian fellowship can be nourished and sustained only by the Gospel, which created it (John 8:31, 32; Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 20:20; Acts 29:27, 28; Luke 11:27, 28; John 15:7-9; 1 John 2:24, 25; Col. 3:14-16).

2. *By applying the corrective measures of the Law and the healing powers of the Gospel whenever the church is invaded by errors in teaching and preaching* (Titus 1:9; 1:13, 14; 1 Tim. 1:3, 4; 1 Cor. 1:10, 11; 3:3, 4; Eph. 4:1-6; Col. 3:14-16; 2 Thess. 3:14, 15), by corruptions of morals (Matt. 18:15; Luke 17: 3, 4; Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Tim. 4:1-3), and by schismatic and separatistic tendencies (Titus 3:10; 1 Cor. 1:10, 11; 1 Cor. 3:3, 4), which impede Christian fellowship. (Cp. Acts 15:1-29; also the manner in which St. Paul deals with erring Christians in his epistles. For the importance of correcting error see James 5:19, 20).

3. *By resolutely confronting, exposing, and excluding all that threatens to vitiate and destroy the fellowship* (Matt. 7:15, 17; 16:11, 12; Gal. 5:9; 1:6-9; Acts 19:8-10; 2 John 9-11; Rom. 16:16-20; 1 Tim. 1:19, 20; 1 Cor. 5:3-6; Matt. 18:15-18), whether it be a satanic intrusion from outside the church or a satanic perversion from within (John 8:44; 2 Cor. 2:8-11; 2 Cor. 11:2-4; 1 Tim. 4:1, 2; Matt. 24:24). (Cp. 2 Peter 2:1-10; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; 1 John 2:18, 19; Eph. 5:6-11; Matt. 12:25, 30-32; Jude 17-23; 2 Peter 3:1-3, 17, 18; 1 Cor. 15:32-34; 1 Tim. 6:3-5).¹⁵

We need to note particularly the second point in this citation as we seek to deal with problems in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod today. Three situations are indicated which call for “the corrective measures of the Law” and the “healing power of the Gospel. They are:

1. The invasion of the church by errors in teaching and preaching
2. Corruption of morals
3. Schismatic and separatistic tendencies which impede Christian fellowship.

Who would deny that Satan has afflicted our church body with all three of these problems? The Synod itself has identified serious errors, the Eighth Commandment is violated with reckless abandon, and a church within a church operates its own seminary and mission society! The more pressing question is how we propose to deal with our problems – now – before further offense is given. As the Scriptures teach, we must deal with them through the proper application of Law and Gospel and by “resolutely confronting, exposing, and excluding all that threatens to vitiate and destroy the fellowship”.

Doctrinal Discipline

This is not to say that separation from erring Christians should occur as soon as error is noted. Who of us could long remain in such a case? On the contrary, separation from erring brethren should occur only when all reasonable steps to correct the error and restore such brethren have failed. No, the church under the Scriptures employs both Law and Gospel in a fraternal and evangelical practice of Christian discipline toward those whose life or doctrine contradicts the teaching of Holy Scripture and vitiates or denies the Gospel of Jesus Christ, thereby impairing fellowship within the church of Jesus Christ. Heresy is the *persistent* advocacy of error, and erring brethren, whether individuals or churches, need our earnest efforts to correct them on the basis of God's Word before we take the always regrettable ultimate step of separation. But doctrinal discipline is necessary for the preservation of the Gospel among us, for the promulgation or toleration of error neither builds nor sustains the church. It is therefore mandatory that procedures for doctrinal discipline within and between church bodies be as direct and uncomplicated as possible; that persons responsible for the public supervision of doctrine exercise that responsibility without prodding and without harassment, and that all of us, pastors and laity, keep ourselves informed on what is being taught, preached, and written in the church so that we can exercise a mutual ministry of concern toward each other. Evangelical doctrinal discipline is not legalistic, as some assert. It rather helps brethren remain faithful to the truth which alone makes men free. Even such separation as is commanded by God is to serve as a fraternal admonition to the separated brethren to the end that they may heed the whole counsel of God for the sake of their salvation.

For the church under the Scriptures, considerations of truth must take precedence over considerations of love, should these be in conflict, for Christian love is always dependent upon the truth of the Gospel. When a choice must be made between external unity and the truth of the Gospel, unity must yield to truth. For it is better to be divided for the sake of the truth than to be united in error. Such division is the responsibility of those who depart from the truth, rather than those who follow it. Dr. Charles Porterfield Krauth, distinguished American Lutheran churchman of the nineteenth century, stated it well: “Truthful separation is far better than dishonest union, and two churches are happier and more kindly in their mutual relations when their differences

are frankly confessed than when they are clouding with ambiguities and double meanings the real divergencies".¹⁶

But this is not to advocate that those of us on opposite sides of issues should now separate. Rather, we need to recall who we are: "holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd" (SA, III, xii, 2). We are one in Christ, and from that oneness in Him we can draw the love and strength to deal with each other as brethren who want to uphold God's truth for the sake of both church and world. Our given spiritual unity is the presupposition and basis for seeking concord in the church on the basis of God's Word. We will not find the model for such concord in any negotiated settlement that compromises God's truth, but we will find it by hearing the voice of our Shepherd in His Holy Word—a voice that calls us to repentance through the Law, speaks forgiveness through the Gospel, and offers the Holy Spirit for the amendment of our sinful lives. There is no shortcut.

Our Pledge

Let all of us, as members of the church under the Scriptures, reaffirm the following statement from the Formula of Concord as our own stance and pledge to one another:

We have no intention (since we have no authority to do so) to yield anything of the eternal and unchangeable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquility, and outward harmony. Nor would such peace and harmony last, because it would be contrary to the truth and actually intended for its suppression. Still less by far are we minded to whitewash or cover up any falsification of true doctrine or any publicly condemned errors. We have a sincere delight in and deep love for true harmony and are cordially inclined and determined on our part to do everything in our power to further the same. We desire such harmony as will not detract anything from the divine truth of the holy Gospel, that will not give place to the smallest error but will lead the poor sinner to true and sincere repentance, raise him up through faith, strengthen him in his new obedience, and thus justify and save for him forever through the sole merit of Christ, and so forth. (FC, SD, XI, 95-96)¹⁷

RALPH A. BOHLMANN

FOOTNOTES

1. A great deal of helpful material already exists on the Biblical and confessional data dealing with the church and its fellowship. Attention is particularly called to two documents produced by the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations and available from Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri. *Theology of Fellowship*, (accepted by the Synod in 1967); Part I is an excellent survey of the Biblical teaching on fellowship, with the texts of all cited Biblical references printed out. Another pertinent document on this subject has just recently been released by the commission; it is entitled *A Lutheran Stance Toward Ecumenism*. Part I of that document contains an excellent summary of Biblical and confessional materials.

Some materials in this essay were adapted from other essays by the author.

2. The sacraments have the same purpose and effect as the preached or spoken Gospel, for they are also ways in which our gracious God "offers counsel and help against sin" (SA, III, iv). They should therefore be thought of as "signed Gospel" or "visible Word" (Ap, XIII, 5), not as something distinct from the Gospel.

3. There has been widespread misunderstanding and misuse of this article by contemporary Lutherans. Its primary purpose was to state what is necessary for the true church to exist, and by implication to affirm that the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church was also present among Luther's followers.

4. The Latin versions of the Formula of Concord tend to use the term "concordia" when speaking of the external fellowship or unity in the church, and to reserve the term "unitas" for the spiritual fellowship existing among true believers in the *una sancta*. For further elaboration of this point, see the CTCR document, *A Lutheran Stance Toward Ecumenism*, pp. 9 ff.

5. This broad sense of "Gospel," which is no doubt derived from the four "Gospel" accounts of the New Testament, was common usage in the sixteenth century and occurs in a variety of ways in the confessions. The expressions *iuxta evangelium* or *secundum evangelium* ("according to the Gospel") traditionally had reference to the four New Testament Gospels or a specific passage in them. The following confessional references are samples of such usage: AC, XXVIII, 5; Ap, XI, 4; Ap, XII, 122; LC, I, 65, 81, 276, 285. By extension, the term "Gospel" is sometimes applied to other parts of the New Testament, or to the Biblical teachings as a whole. For example, when Melanchthon writes that the Mosaic ceremonial laws do not justify "according to the Gospel," his reference is to Colossians 2:16-17 (Ap, XV, 30). When the Apology asserts that we obtain forgiveness of sins freely because of Christ, it is possible to base this assertion on either "Scripture teaches" (Ap, XII, 157) or "Gospel teaches" (Ap, XV, 30). Likewise such expressions as "command of the Gospel" or "the Gospel commands" evidently reflect this broad usage of the term (e. g., Ap, XII, 172). Melanchthon laments the fact that the monks "neither hear nor preach the Gospel," and then asserts that the Gospel deals not only with forgiveness and justification but also is "about true penitence, about works that have the command of God" (Ap, XXVII, 54). Luther regrets that the clergy have learned very little from the "Gospel" about the conduct of their offices, with the result that they abuse their Christian liberty (LC, Preface, 3-4).

It is understandable that "Gospel" in this broad sense was also used for the proclamation or teaching of the contemporary church. Luther claims, for example, that "the entire Gospel is an external, oral proclamation" (LC, IV, 30). The Apology equates "Gospel" with "doctrine" in defining the church as the assembly of saints who share the association of the same Gospel or teaching and of the same Holy Spirit" (Ap, VII, 8). Or again, one of the fruits of the fact that "the Gospel is taught purely and diligently among us" is that no Anabaptists have arisen in the churches of the Augsburg Confession; the teaching of Baptism is based on Matthew 28:19, but the content and effect as taught in the church is "Gospel" (Ap, IX, 2). It is often difficult to draw a precise line between the Biblical Gospel and its contemporary proclamation. When, for example, the confessions talk about the "chief doctrine of the Gospel," it is clear that they have reference to the forgiveness of sins for the sake of Jesus Christ (e. g., AC, XXVIII, 52; Ap, XII, 3, 10). But "Gospel" in this expression refers in the first instance to the entire doctrine of the New Testament and then to the proclamation of that doctrine in the church. This expression, incidentally, indicates that the Gospel-in-the-narrow-sense is the most important point and the chief topic of the Gospel-in-the-broad-sense.

Students of the confessions need to be sensitive to the various emphases in the use of the term "Gospel," for the confessions employ the term without great precision and sometimes use it in different ways in the same context (e. g., AC, VII; AC, XXVIII, 5: Tr, 60).

6. The Gospel has been likened to a seamless garment, a golden ring, or a wagon wheel whose hub is Jesus Christ and whose spokes are the articles of faith. The inter-relationship of the articles of faith and their relationship to the Gospel in the narrow sense is explained in the following: "A Review of the Question, What Is a Doctrine?", III, 7, in 1969 L. C. M. S. Convention *Proceedings*, pp. 506-507; *Theology of Fellowship*, Part II, B 2, in 1969 LCMS Convention *Proceedings*, p. 535; and "The Doctrine of the Church in the Lutheran Confessions. Essay Adopted by the Commissioners of The American Lutheran Church and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," in 1967 LCMS Convention *Proceedings*, pp. 417-419.

This inter-relationship can be seen by thinking through the "simple" Gospel on the basis of a passage like John 3:16. Questions like the following lead to a consideration of all theology from creation to eschatology, and indicate why agreement in the Gospel involves full doctrinal agreement: Who is God? Where did the "world" come from? Why did it need God's "love"? Who is God's "Son" and why is he called "only-begotten"? What did he do when the Father "gave" him, and how did this really change man's situation? What is meant by "believing in Him" and how does one get such faith? What does it mean that the world would "perish" without him? What is "eternal life"? On what basis can we be sure that our answers are God's?

7. Erlangen edition, XXVI, 100-101.

8. There is much confusion on this point, also within Lutheranism. But it must be understood that what is in conformity with the Gospel is determined by Holy Scripture, and not by man's subjective decision. It was axiomatic for the confessional fathers that Holy Scripture was God's authoritative revelation. It is a total misreading of the confessions to argue that they were interested only in the soteriological purpose of Holy Scripture and not in its divine authority and infallibility. For a systematic exposition of the confessional view of Holy Scripture, see my book, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), especially Part One.

9. Quoted in "A Review of the Question, 'What Is a Doctrine? ", 1969 *Convention Workbook*, p. 505, note 25. This CTCR document is also available from Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri.

10. This point has not been dealt with at greater length in this essay because a separate essay will be devoted to this subject at the convocation in April 1975. However, attention is called to two CTCR documents which deal with the matter at some length. They are *Gospel and Scripture* and *A Comparative Study of Varying Contemporary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, 1973 *Convention Workbook*, pp. 429-448; also available from Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri. The latter document exhibits key features of two historical-critical approaches and compares them with traditional confessional Biblical interpretation by placing all three approaches in parallel columns.

Scholars outside The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod likewise recognize that the historical-critical method is quite different from the confessional approach to Scripture. Scandinavian theologian Regin Prenter, for example, writes: "The advent of modern natural science and the historical research showed that the Bible is not inerrant in the sense of the doctrine of verbal inspiration. The historical-critical method and later the history of religions methods of research investigated even the Biblical writings and showed that they originated in the same manner as other source documents of religion." Prenter later notes: "As concerns the resurrection there is therefore an unavoidable conflict between religious faith and historical criticisms." He also points out that "the historical-critical treatment of the evangelical tradition is never able to establish anything but the purely human reality of the historical existence of Jesus." He asserts: "The Creator Himself who is present in Jesus' humanity has always been an impossible idea to historical criticism. Therefore, historical criticism necessarily collides with everything in the tradition concerning Jesus which ascribes to Him such divine majesty." In *Creation and Redemption* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 90, 432-433.

11. For a brief review of Biblical and confessional usage of "doctrine" and related terms, see the CTCR document entitled, "A Review of the Question, 'What Is a Doctrine? ", cited in footnote nine. Attention is also called to the excellent essay on the Biblical usage and understanding of "doctrine" written by the late Dr. Paul M. Bretscher and entitled "Take Heed Unto the Doctrine"; it is published in the *Proceedings* of the 1959 synodical convention, pp. 13-46.

12. Attention is called to the many problems treated in I Corinthians as a breach of the baptismal unity of Christians; cf. the CTCR document, *A Lutheran Stance Toward Ecumenism*, pp. 7-8.

13. It should be observed that it is "fundamentalistic" (in the proper sense of that term) to base church fellowship upon agreement in certain basic doctrines to the exclusion of others. This was the position of historic Fundamentalism, as well as of the earlier Moravian slogan, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity."

14. 1971 Resolution 3-26, *Proceedings*, p. 139, contains a recent statement of our position. It is interesting to note that the *Common Confession*, which the Synod adopted in 1952 in connection with its fellowship efforts with the American Lutheran Church, emphasized that a denial of any teaching of the Scriptures involves a mutilation of the complete Gospel and states that "it is for this reason that a full and common obedience

to the Holy Scriptures is an indispensable requisite for church fellowship."

15. *Theology of Fellowship*, pp. 10-11.

16. Charles Porterfield Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation* (Philadelphia: 1913; first published in 1871), p. 326.

17. This statement was reaffirmed by the Joint Faculties of the St. Louis and Springfield seminaries on February 28, 1975, as an apt expression of their desire to work toward reconciliation on the basis of the Word of God.

Abbreviations

AC	-	Augsburg Confession
Ap	-	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
SC	-	Small Catechism
LC	-	Large Catechism
SA	-	Smalcald Articles
FC, SD	-	Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration
FC, Ep	-	Formula of Concord, Epitome

Note: All references from the Lutheran Confessions are cited from *The Book of Concord*, edited by T. G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959)

THE CHURCH UNDER THE SCRIPTURES

Sub-title 1:

How should the church, in faithfulness to the Scriptures and with integrity, deal with problems within her midst?

Sub-title 2:

What is divisive of fellowship?

(Herbert J. A. Bouman)

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer!”

(Ps. 19:14)

For me, at least, the trouble in Missouri has been, and continues to be, a source of sorrow and anger, of frustration and humiliation, of perplexity and fear, of anguish and pain. I approach this assignment with all of these emotions vying for dominance. My immediate family, beginning with my father and including wife, brothers, sisters, brothers-in-law, nephews, son, and myself, has given more than 350 years of honorable and devoted professional service to the pastoral and teaching ministry of the Missouri Synod. She was our beloved mother, our home. We rejoiced in her successes and sorrowed over her reverses. We cherished her treasures and regretted her failings. We admired her strengths and bemoaned her weaknesses. We recognized that Missouri has never for a single day been without problems, big problems, some of her own making, some imposed from without. Yet we recognized that in a specific time and place in the long history of God's dealings with men, the Missouri Synod was an instrument, fashioned by God and endowed with His strength and grace, a tool in Christ's church to achieve His purposes. Of course we knew that Missouri wasn't perfect, never was and never could be, as long as God chose to forge fallible and weak and sinful people into His instrument, but we also knew that there was no other that was better.

So it is with a pain beyond words that I approach this occasion and the trouble that has called it into being. What in the world has happened to our dearly beloved church? How could we ever get into such an appalling mess? With apologies to Paul, “O foolish Missourians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so many things in vain?” (Gal. 3:1 ff.) Disruptions everywhere, in high places and low, in boards and staffs, in districts and churches and schools, in parishes and in families. Every one may catalog his own hurts, heart-aches seemingly beyond analgesic.

The pain is compounded by a feeling of perplexity as I search for the causes and cogencies of the controversies. In the great controversies of the church in the past, dealing with the Holy Trinity, the Deity and humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, with man and sin and salvation, with the sacraments, and others, the basic elements of the Christian faith were at stake, as well as the very life of the church itself. But what do we find within the Synod? On any given day, in any gathering of members, in congregations, in conferences, in schools, in conventions: When we are called upon to "confess our faith," all of us respond in the words of the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed. When we are confronted with the confessional paragraph in our Constitution, we all sincerely commit ourselves to the Holy Scriptures as the inspired written Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and to the Lutheran Confessions as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God. We have been assured repeatedly that none of us is personally charged with, or convicted of false teaching. All of us have protested with unabated vigor that "the true treasure of the church is the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." We all want to be faithful to our scriptural and confessional commitment. We all want to keep our doctrine pure. We are all opposed to "false and pernicious doctrine." We all want to correct what is wrong. We all want what promotes the welfare of our church which we all love and what redounds to the glory of God. Etc. Etc.

What a miracle of divine mercy! What a colossal cause for joy! For enthusiastic doxology! For brother to embrace brother in unfeigned love! "Now thank we all our God with hearts and hands and voices!" The atmosphere electric with doxology! But what about our problems and differences and difficulties? Are they not real? Must we not "settle" them? Do they not put us on "opposite sides of the fence"? Does this mess leave any room for joy and doxology and fraternity? Of course the problems are real and serious. Of course we cannot ignore them. But they are not problems of the faith, issues which precipitated serious controversy in the church in ages past. There was a sense of proportion, which seems often to be lacking today. In view of our common faith and confession our differences do not put us on opposite sides of the fence. The bonds of our common faith and commitment are strong enough to contain our brotherhood in spite of our differences. Our common faith and confession provide so large and solid a basis for our standing and walking together, that there should be every reason for us all to be "lost in wonder, love, and praise." This perspective should inform our judgments and procedures and determine our priorities. We have all subscribed the Lutheran Confessions which also contain this statement: "If all the offenses are put together, still the one doctrine of the forgiveness of sins, that by faith we freely obtain the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, brings enough good to hide all the evils" (Apology XXVIII, 23).

Yet the practical implications of that sweeping assessment appear to be lost upon us to a frighteningly large extent. And frightening is the word for it.

My heart fails me for fear as I view the synodical scene and approach this task. General Sherman's estimate of war applies doubly to warfare in the church. Paul's admission that he thought he was doing God a service by killing Christians suggests the horrors of religious fanaticism. The enraged Jews ground their teeth against Stephen and cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him (Acts 7:57). Among the fruits of fanaticism are irrational behavior, loss of self-control, loud shouting, unwillingness to listen, and concerted action to destroy an opponent. No holds seem to be barred. The single aim has to be victory, the triumph of "truth," and that end justifies the use of any means, no matter what or how great the casualties. And if uncounted non-combatants are mangled, well, c'est la guerre! This sin corrodes us all. In my brothers I see a mirror of myself, for I am of the same stock.

I shiver with fear when I see our state of affairs described as follows: "There is a schism among us because some of us are Bible believers and some are Bible doubters; because some of us want pure doctrine and others don't; because some of us are opposed to false doctrine and others are not; because some of us want to be true Lutherans and others don't; because some of us believe the Bible is inspired and others don't; because some of us are conservative and others are liberal; because some of us are evangelical and others are legalistic; because some of us are loyal and some are not, etc."

According to the new man created in us by the Holy Spirit through Baptism, we all have good intentions. Among Christian brothers this must be assumed, also because it cannot be empirically verified. Yet the words and actions that are to give concretion to our intentions often come through to our addressees as anything but good and constructive. It is not what we purpose in our hearts, but what we hear the others say and what we see them do that affects us and shapes our response. And this terrifies me. With fear and trembling I must speak honestly, though this may make my "image" unflattering and repulsive beyond repair.

On the one hand: Some of the actions of some synodical leaders, conventions, boards, committees, no matter how well intentioned, have come through as despotic abuse of power, as deciding matters of conscience by simple majorities, by means of a well-oiled steamroller riding rough-shod over the feelings of brothers, by vindictive dismissals and destruction of the careers of those suspected of harboring dissent, legitimate or not, by unconscionable brainwashing of the man in the pew, causing him to view dissent from policies and procedures, even though not divinely prescribed but humanly devised, automatically as rebellion, not only against the establishment, but against Scripture itself, if not against God. Because of our position we are *a priori* maligned and condemned as false teachers, regardless of our most sincere and truthful protestations. We stand condemned, before we have been fairly tried or convicted, as people who "are trying to take our Bible away from us." Thus the purest, or rather the foulest demagoguery operates under the guise

of a completely laudable concern for the truth of Scripture, and in the name of preserving the holy Gospel the most flagrant legalism is resorted to. Alongside repeated admonitions to go through proper channels there is a systematic blocking of those very channels when attempts are made to use them. Pleas to meet in fraternal dialog with officials, pleas to be heard out by boards and executives, pleas for fair consideration at conventions, pleas for appropriate measures by the Council of Presidents apparently go unheeded. We are persistently called upon to repent, while those issuing the call appear as people who refuse to admit that they have anything to repent of. Mindless retaliatory actions are instituted against dissenters. Incredibly, fellow communicant members within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, who are not under discipline, are barred from certain altars within the Synod. In other words,—and please, remember that I am merely reporting how things come through to me and a host of others, I cannot judge any man's heart,—the way to "settle" a problem, to make an opponent capitulate to the truth, is systematically and progressively to starve him out spiritually, academically, ecclesiastically, and synodically. Concurrently, on another track, public promises and efforts at reconciliation are provided for their implementation with layer upon layer of elaborate machinery, with unconditional surrender predetermined as the only acceptable outcome. And when, out of deeply anguished consciences, such procedures are objected to and resisted, we are pilloried far and wide as "spoiled brats," "poor losers," "trouble makers," "publicity hounds," insurrectionists, etc., whose behavior is simply disgraceful, when that which caused this behavior is equally disgraceful. It is as if some one would hit people over the head with a club and then accuse them of disgraceful behavior when they cry ouch!

On the other hand, and on the other side: "That is complete distortion of the facts. We don't recognize ourselves in that caricature. It misses the point of our concern." Of course, of course it does. From their perspective it certainly is out of line. But in their view our profile is just as bad. They hear the others in equally disparaging terms. Their counterparts seem to come through to them as people guilty of all manner of derelictions. "We (the "other side" is saying) "occupy and sincerely strive to maintain the 'historic' stance of the Lutheran Confessions and of our Synod. We believe that the others are plotting to undermine our historic position, to take over, to let down the bars so that anything goes. Instead of humbly accepting the verdict of the church and loyally falling in line, they are arrogant, defiant, contentious, rebellious, insubordinate, impenitent, judgmental, divisive, irresponsible, antinomian, Gospel-reductionist, doctrinally 'shaky' and indifferent. They constantly harp on procedure and avoid getting down to the 'issues.' They have broken faith with the Synod and they willfully go their own way. They have cast doubt on the veracity and reliability of the Bible, etc. etc." And now it is the turn of "our side" to react: "That is a complete distortion of the facts. We don't recognize ourselves in that caricature. It misses the point of our concern."

And of course, of course it does.

All this adds up to a fearful failure of proper communication, a failure that may be understandable but hardly justifiable. We ourselves, all of us, are the greatest problem. Making full allowances for over-statement and over-reaction, there remains a hard core of truth, unhappy truth in the description of both sides. Old Adam still tenants every heart. There are no vacancies. We have leaned on our own understanding, our strategies, our ingenuity, our votes, our resources, our machinery, our persuasiveness, instead of trusting in the Lord with all our hearts. Until we recognize the nullity, and even perversity of our own devices, we are mired in work righteousness and a *de facto* repudiation of *sola gratia, sola fides*. And *solus Dominus*, for “unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain” (Ps. 127:1).

The Lord! Amid the welter of emotions churning my heart, pain, perplexity, anger, pride, fear, and despair, enough to make me thoroughly wretched, there is also, and above all, the Lord! “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:25). We have His infallible promises, His oath, His covenant, His blood, His Spirit, and so the last and, please God, the triumphant element in our approach is confidence, the confidence to join Paul: “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair” (2 Cor. 4:7.8). More than half a century ago, my confirmation class sang a prayer that is familiar to most of us and that expresses what our attitude should be, individually and corporately, as we approach our task:

Take Thou my hands and lead me
O'er life's rough way;
With heavenly manna feed me
From day to day.
Alone, my footsteps falter
Or straggle wide.
Thou, who my life canst alter,
Be Thou my Guide!

In this spirit let us consider our theme:

The Church under the Scriptures

Under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the New Testament is a book of, by, and for the church. It will therefore be helpful to organize the vast amount of pertinent material around a few basic thoughts: I. The Nature of the Church; II. The Church's Mission; III. Dealing with Problems in the Church; IV. The Church's Attitudes; V. The Church's Resources.

I. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

“Who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ,

the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. . . . From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Matth. 16:15 ff.) “You have one teacher, and you are all brethren; you have one master, the Christ” (Matth. 23:8). “And He said to them, Follow me; immediately they followed Him” (Matth. 4:19.20). “It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.” “I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth.” “The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” “When the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness to me” (John 16:7; 14:16.26; 15:26). The apostle speaks of “the immeasurable greatness of His power in us who believe, according to the working of His great might which He accomplished in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and made Him sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and He has put all things under His feet and has made Him *the head over all things for the church, which is His body*” (Eph. 1:19 ff.) “So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow-citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:19 ff.) “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4 f.). “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God’s people” (1 Pet. 2:9 ff.). “By one Spirit baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). “In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:26 f.). “We who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:17). “As in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Rom. 12:4 f.). “The company of those who believed were of one heart and one soul” (Acts 4:32). Whether they are called disciples, or brethren, or

Christians, or saints, they are always the same blessed company, the church of the Triune God.

The biblical material cited offers us an inexhaustible store of thoughts on the nature of the church, its origin, make-up, source of power, as well as the vertical and horizontal relationships of the individual members, their diversity and their unity, their blessed fellowship with God and with each other. A continuing, thorough study and appreciation of the biblical teaching about the church is basic to the life and activity of the church. Here it must suffice to have called attention to its chief dimensions. (For a reasonably comprehensive summary of how the Lutheran Confessions reproduce and respond to the biblical ecclesiology, the reader is kindly asked to peruse the author's "Some Thoughts on the Church in the Lutheran Symbols," Concordia Theological Monthly, March, 1968, 175 ff.).

II. THE CHURCH'S MISSION

"As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 20:21). The risen Lord completed His mission to earth on behalf of the Father. That mission is the pervasive theme of the Gospels, the apostolic kerygma concerning the Person, the attitudes, the words and deeds, the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By Word and deed the incarnate Lord unfolded and realized what God is up to. "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). "For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him" (v. 17). This is what God is up to, "this is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent" (John 6:29). "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me." "For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life" (John 6:38.40). "The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matth. 20:28). "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known" (John 1:18). Having discharged His mission, the Lord now transfers it to His disciples, His church. "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matth. 28:18-20).

The Book of Acts tells us how the church began to see its dynamic character and to carry out its mission, its witnessing and discipling task among all nations "to the end of the earth." And the epistles to a large extent show the church's mission in terms of nurturing, upbuilding, counseling, strength-

ening, consoling its members, and dealing with problems of faith and life in their midst. Throughout the New Testament we are confronted with issues of “doctrine” and of “practice,” a handy but somewhat artificial and dubious distinction. Both what is explicitly dealt with and what is passed over in silence has something instructive to say to us.

On Pentecost the apostles told “the mighty works of God” (*ta megalia tou Theou*), that is to say, they proclaimed “Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through Him in your midst,” crucified and killed and raised up. “God has made Him both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:11. 22 ff. 36). Through Baptism in His name God bestowed the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (v. 38), and this is the apostles’ teaching to which those who were added to the church devoted themselves (v. 42). This was *the doctrine*, for “every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42). Philip “preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12) to the Samaritans and “the good news of Jesus” to the Ethiopian (v. 35). So Peter spoke in the house of Cornelius, “preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ. . . . how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. . . . To Him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name” (Acts 10:34 ff.). So, in this “Gospel-reductionist” way, throughout. So, too, Paul in all his preaching. He spoke of “the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God,” and that is what it meant to declare “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:24.27). He saw himself “set apart for the Gospel of God, . . . the gospel concerning His Son, . . . Jesus Christ our Lord . . . to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of His name among all the nations” (Rom. 1:1 ff.). To mankind, lost in sin and under God’s judgment, God comes with His super-abundant grace and justifies the sinner for the sake of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 1:5). The focus of all apostolic doctrine was that “Christ be formed in you” (Gal. 4:19), that “Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph. 3:17-19).

The radical newness of being “in Christ,” a “new creation,” the full implications of redemption and justification and sharing in the death and life of Christ, this is the “doctrinal” dimension of the church’s mission. This is the “doctrine” that dare not be opposed (Rom. 16:17), the “sound doctrine, in accordance with the glorious gospel of God” (1 Tim. 1:10.11), the “wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which accords with godliness” (1 Tim. 6:3), the “pattern of the sound words which you have

heard from me in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:13), what Timothy learned from his Bible, which instructed him "for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:14 f.), the "sound doctrine" in which a bishop should be competent to give instruction (Tit. 1:9). In short, this is "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

The "practical" side of the church's mission is inseparable from the "doctrinal" side. The doctrine concerning life is the inevitable expression of the disciple relationship. "Follow me, learn of me, deny yourself, take up your cross, let the disciple be like his master." They should be "merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers" (Matth. 5:7-9), they should love their neighbor as themselves (Matth. 22:37). Buried with Christ in Baptism, they have risen with Him to walk in newness of life, dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6). The commandments of the Decalog and all other commandments "are summed up in this sentence, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:9 f.). The great "therefore, my beloved brethren" passages, the admonitions for the Christian life given by the apostles for this dimension of the church's mission are inextricably linked with the person, the attitudes, the experiences of Jesus Christ. You have died with Christ, therefore be dead to sin. You have been crucified with Christ, therefore crucify your flesh with its lusts and desires. Christ was sacrificed for us, therefore present your bodies as a living sacrifice. Christ died for all that they who live should not henceforth live for themselves but for Him who died for them and rose again. The Son of man came to serve, therefore serve. The Son of God humbled Himself and took the form of a servant, therefore "let this mind be in you." Christ did not please Himself, therefore, do not please yourselves, but your neighbor. God gave us the victory over death through Jesus Christ, therefore, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, including the collection. You have been called to a glorious hope, therefore, lead a life worthy of your calling. Christ loved us and gave Himself for us, therefore, walk in love. "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:27). "Lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work" (Col. 1:10). You are God's beloved children, therefore be imitators of God. The saving grace of God has the function of "training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for Himself a people of His own who are zealous for good deeds" (Tit. 2:11-14). Further examples could be multiplied. What they all have in common is that the church's mission with regard to instruction for the Christian life is rooted in Christ, modeled after Christ, draws its strength from Christ, and acts in a Christ-like way, self-forgetfully, self-sacrificingly, for the good of the neighbor, the man "for whom Christ died."

III. DEALING WITH PROBLEMS IN THE CHURCH

Of course, there have always been problems, ever since “man’s first disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden tree brought death into the world and all our woe.” The prime target of our Lord’s censure was the pride, hypocrisy, and selfishness of the Scribes and Pharisees, that issued in work righteousness and legalism, exemplified by the “prayer” of the Pharisee in the temple, “God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get” (Luke 18:9 ff.). And this because they “trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others.” Their piety, their charity, their prayer, their fasting were all performed “before men in order to be seen by them,” “that they may be praised by men,” with one eye on their public relations. (Matth. 6). The Lord’s most devastating denunciations were leveled at the religious leaders who “bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders,” who “shut the kingdom of heaven against men,” who “tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith” (Matth. 23). In its most concentrated focus what is condemned is unbelief, rejection of God’s way through Jesus Christ, and a selfish and loveless life. “He who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:18.19). Some of the most radical denunciation is reserved for those who cause others to stumble (Matth. 18:6 ff.).

The young church had its serious problems. Peter was sharply criticized for his association with Cornelius and his household. Peter calmly and carefully justified his course of action and thus silenced his accusers. “And they glorified God” (Acts 11). The experiences of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey evoked the same criticism from Jewish Christians who came to Antioch from Judea. The argument was hot and heavy, for “Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them.” They decided to deal with the issue in consultation with the church and apostles and elders in Jerusalem. Here, too, there was “much debate.” But in fraternal, face-to-face discussion, under the Holy Spirit’s guidance, they hammered out an agreement: “It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity.” The result was that “they rejoiced at the exhortation.” There were personality problems. Paul and Barnabas had a violent falling out with regard to John Mark, “and there arose a sharp contention (*paroxysm*), so that they separated from each other.” Their ways parted, but there was no separation in the fellowship (Acts 15). They had their differences and faced dissent, but they did not “settle” the differences and remove the dissent by

annihilating the dissenters. When even the pagan Governor Festus recognized as axiomatic the provision of Roman law that "it was not the custom of the Romans to give up any one before the accused met the accusers face to face, and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him" (Acts 25:16), Christ's people could be expected to achieve at least that level of fairness. After all, they had the Lord's own directive about dealing with a brother tactfully, face to face, and with the supporting evidence of at least two or three witnesses (Matth. 18:15 ff.).

The infant congregations had their problems. They were admonished by their apostolic leaders to deal with the problems constructively and fraternally. "As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions." "None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself." "Why do you despise your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God." "Then let us no more pass judgment on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother." "Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Rom. 14). When there are differences within the fellowship, the solution lies not in splintering the fellowship, for the division makers are sharply rebuked (Rom. 16:17), but in a serious endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). Not dissension but unanimity (not uniformity) should characterize the fellowship (1 Cor. 1:10). So the churches of the Augsburg Confession present their teaching "unanimously," "with great unanimity" (*eintraechtiglich; magno consensu*; not by 55-45 majorities). Jealousy and strife and party spirit is "of the flesh." Not, "I am a Paul man, or an Apollos man, or a Cephas man," or the respective names in our church (1 Cor. 3:3 ff.).

The so-called "vice catalogs" in some of the epistles give us a good idea of what the New Testament church frequently dealt with. For example, "Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like" (Gal. 5:19 ff.). These are the "unfruitful works of darkness" which Christians are to shun (Eph. 5:11). If, and to the extent that, our present differences impinge on our faith in our Lord and on our personal and social behavior, they are proper objects of our mutual concern. If they do not, our altercations become "disputing about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers," "stupid, senseless controversies" which "breed quarrels." "And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponent with gentleness" (2 Tim. 2:14. 23-25).

IV. THE CHURCH'S ATTITUDES

The success of the church's dealing with problems and differences within its midst depends on what people bring to the meetings that are designed to deal with the issues. The mechanics and the agenda may be ever so "correct"

and “legal,” little or nothing constructive will result if the perspectives and attitudes are not right. What really matters? What is most important? What are we really after? How shall we go about it? These questions have to do with priorities, goals, and attitudes, and we ought to be clear on them on the basis of the Scriptures. Reading through the New Testament just from this perspective is an overwhelming experience, that should be required of all who want to participate responsibly in the fraternal dialog within the fellowship. Much of what follows is “obvious,” we already “know” it, we can “take it for granted.” But often it is precisely the “obvious” that is forgotten or neglected.

A striking feature in all the gospels is the large number of incidents in the life of our Lord and His disciples that are associated with the Sabbath. Every such incident led to a head-on clash with the leaders of the Jewish church. In fact they contrived to create such incidents. What is particularly significant is what our Lord had to say in the context of these incidents. When Jesus and His disciples walked through a grain field on a Sabbath, the disciples stilled their hunger by plucking up ears of grain to eat. The Pharisees said, “Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the sabbath.” Jesus did not defend the disciples by disparaging the Sabbath provisions. On the contrary, He cited an incident from the life of David, “how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests. Or have you not read in the law how on the sabbath the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here” (Matth. 12:1 ff.). In other words, it was a question of priorities. Under normal circumstances rules and regulations and by-laws, if you will, are fine and help promote an ordered existence. But when an emergency arises, it is not “business as usual,” but a more important consideration supersedes rules and regulations and by-laws. When the Pharisees confronted Jesus with a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath day, they asked, “Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath?” Jesus posed a counter question: “What man of you, if he has one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep!” (Matth. 12:9 ff.). Priorities! On another Sabbath day there was a woman who had been severely crippled for eighteen years. When Jesus healed her, the ruler of the synagogue indignantly said, “There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.” Then the Lord answered him, “Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox and his ass from the manger, and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, . . . be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?” (Luke 13:11 ff.). Priorities! In all these incidents our Lord was “people-oriented,” rather than “thing-oriented.” Are we clear on our priorities?

What are we after? Our Lord clearly states that the goal of all inter-fraternal dealing should be to “gain the brother” (*kerdaino*). St. Paul was after that. “I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win (*kerdaino*) the

more.” And that means, “that I might by all means save (*sozo*) some” (1 Cor. 9:19 ff.). This ultimate, eschatological goal is retroactive. It informs all the goals for the fellowship here and now. “Let us then pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding” (Rom. 14:19). “Live in harmony with one another” (Rom. 12:16). “Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him” (Rom. 15:2). “May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:5.6). We are to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). We must be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” “we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the Head” (Eph. 4:3.15). Our manner of life should be worthy of the Gospel of Christ, so that we may stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel (Phil. 1:27). These goals would be frustrated by precipitous and premature action and a penchant for “instant housecleaning” (cf. Matth. 13:24; 1 Cor. 4:5).

These lovely goals cannot be achieved by our reason or strength. The “flesh” in us all has opposite priorities and goals and strives constantly to produce the “works of the flesh” to thwart anything positive and good. We all need the Holy Spirit to create new motions and attitudes, to produce His blessed “fruits” within us. And we have our Savior’s assurance that the heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him” (Luke 11:13). And in anticipation of this power from on high, which the ascending Lord promised His little flock, they “with one accord devoted themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14). The New Testament offers us an exquisite garland of virtues or attitudes. “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness” (Gal. 5:22 f.). “Blessed are the meek” (Matth. 5:5). We are to act “with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love” (Eph. 4:2). In the spirit and with the mind of Christ we must empty ourselves and humble ourselves and take on the form of a servant (Phil. 2:5 ff) and in humility count others better than ourselves. A forgiving spirit should control our approaches to our brothers, as God in Christ forgave us (Eph. 4:32). Nicodemus asks, “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” (John 7:51). Can we Christians do less? A spirit of unquenchable joy and doxology pervaded the early church and radiated a glow to their environs. “Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:46.47), and even when they were admonished, “they rejoiced at the exhortation” (Acts 15:31). In a very comprehensive way St. Paul ties all the attitudes together: “Put on, then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which

binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body, and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col. 3:12-17).

"Above all these things put on love." No single attitude receives so much emphasis throughout the New Testament as love. Love is the embodiment of all other virtues. This is the Lord's new commandment and it constitutes the distinctive hallmark of discipleship (John 13:34.35). And the disciple "whom Jesus loved" faithfully repeats this commandment (1 John 3 and 4, *passim*). And Paul, who never ceased in his adoring amazement of the fact that "He loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20), constantly lays this charge on the Christians. "Let love be genuine; love one another with brotherly affection" (Rom. 12:9.10). "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law." "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:8 ff.) "Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us" (Eph. 5:2). Without love, nothing is anything. "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13). And Peter, whom a loving Lord reclaimed and pledged to love Him, wrote, "Above all things, hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8). How is it with our love life?

V. THE CHURCH'S RESOURCES

(The Church under the Scriptures)

Resources unlimited! The extent, magnitude, power, and availability of what is at the disposal of God's people are simply beyond calculation. When God laid His name upon us in our Baptism "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," He drew us into the circle of His blessing, His grace, His life, His power. As He said in connection with the benediction that Aaron was to lay on God's people, "so shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them" (Numb. 6:22 ff.). So the apostle could say to God's new people, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14). These are God's parting words to us week after week as we close our period of worship. Can we ever stop being "surprised by joy" at this blessing? It is no idle wish, but a potent reality, "for what Thou, O Lord, hast blessed is blessed for ever" (1 Chron. 17:27). God gave us His only-begotten Son, and

the Son has all authority in heaven and on earth, and He guarantees His presence with His disciples to the close of the age. He promised, made possible, and carried out the sending of the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, the Spirit of truth, who will teach us all things and recall the words of Jesus. He promised His church power in the descent of the Holy Spirit, power to be the church, to perform its mission, and to deal with its problems in the right way, and He kept that promise. Through the sending of His Son God has adopted us as sons. And because we are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts" (Gal. 4).

The resources of the Triune God become concrete in the gifts of the ascended Lord to His church. "And His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:7 ff. cf. 1 Cor. 12:4 ff.). In fact, all Christian people are great and greatly neglected resources of the church. All disciples are the light of the world and the salt of the earth, and productive of good works (Matth. 5:14 f.). The whole company of believers constitutes a "royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). Resources unlimited!

In addition to these personal resources of the Triune God, and the leaders and members of the church, God has also equipped the church with the proper instruments for its tasks. These instruments are the Word and the Sacraments. In this sense the formulation of the theme, "the church under the Scriptures," is not really accurate. The church is not, strictly speaking, "under" the Scriptures, as little as a builder is "under" hammer and saw, or a mechanic "under" his wrench. The church is under its Lord, the body is under its Head. The Word is an instrument, a tool, given by God to His people to use in doing their job. It is a power tool in the highest sense of the term, fully adequate and effective to "accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Is. 55:11). The phrase, "the church under the Scriptures," is therefore a figure of speech, a metonymy, the "*medium operationis pro persona operante*." That makes the Scriptures no less authoritative, the sole authority for what God is really up to ("opus proprium") and what He uses in the service of what He is really up to ("opus alienum"); the sole authority for telling us how to conduct ourselves in relation to what God is up to and our involvement with it. The Law of God is devastatingly authoritative in its function. It accuses and condemns and reveals sin and kills and puts us all under God's judgment (Rom. 3). But that is not what God is up to. "Christ is the end of the law" (Rom. 10:4). The Gospel is the Word of God's ultimate objective, what He is really up to. It is the power of God to salvation (Rom. 1:16). Because of Christ's suffering and resurrection, the Word becomes the instrument for repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name (Luke 24:46 f.). God's definitive communication is the Word made flesh

(John 1:14; cf. Heb. 1:1-3). The words that He has spoken are spirit and life (John 6:63), and continuance in that faith-creating, truth-imparting, liberating Word is the mark of discipleship (John 8:31) and promises the divine indwelling (John 14:23).

This means, of course, that the church must use the tool of the Word in the function and for the purpose of what God is up to. The church must take the Scriptures on their, that is, God's terms. Any other approach is a misuse. The history of the church is full of doctrinal aberrations resulting from wrong use. As Lutherans we gratefully subscribe to the claim of the Confessions that they interpret Scripture in line with God's intentions. In our synodical constitution we say not only that the Confessions are a true "statement" of the Word of God, but also a true "exposition." In other words, they reproduce biblical doctrine (statement) and they demonstrate the correct hermeneutics, the proper principles of interpretation (exposition). The teaching is biblical because the principle of interpretation is biblical. What is distinctive about the Lutheran view of Scripture is not that it is divinely inspired and infallible and authoritative, but the way in which it interprets, or uses, Scripture. And the Confessions claim to have discovered this correct approach to Scripture in Scripture itself, and not imposed it on Scripture from outside. They clearly distinguish between literary hermeneutic and theological hermeneutic. For the understanding of any document written in human language, it is necessary to know about vocabulary, grammar, syntax, rhetoric, tenses, cases, moods, etc., etc. What is distinctive about Lutheran interpretation is the theological hermeneutic of the Confessions.

There are many passages in the New Testament which are not only statements of fact but hermeneutical guidelines. "The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known" (*ekeinos exegesato*; John 1:17.18). That is to say, Christ is God's communication or Word (*Logos*) to man. If we want to know what God has to say to us, we must go through Christ. This is true also of the Old Testament. Its essential content is a witness to Christ (John 5:39. 46; Luke 24:44). The only approach to God and the truth is through Jesus (John 14:6). Without the proper hermeneutical guidelines, the true import of Scripture cannot be ascertained. The Ethiopian could not understand what he was reading "unless some one guides me." Philip provided that guidance by telling him "the good news of Jesus" (Acts 8:31.32). The instruction offered by the Scriptures consists in "that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope," which, in turn, is designed to lead Christians to live in harmony in Christ Jesus for the purpose of a unison glorifying of God (Rom. 15:4 f.). Christians "have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16). Obstacles to the knowledge of God are destroyed when people take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). In Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3). The author of Hebrews uses

theological hermeneutic when he summarizes the whole Old Testament, beginning with Abel, in terms of faith, and then makes the application in line with what God is up to: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:1.2). In this way Scripture is an eminently practical tool, "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16.17).

And so, on and on. Even so, we have only scratched the surface. One more thought, in conclusion. The Evangelist John gives us an important hermeneutical clue to the understanding of the miracles of Jesus. Changing water into wine at Cana was the first "sign" (*semeion*) that Jesus did (John 2:11). Some time later Jesus healed the son of an official at Capernaum, and the evangelist observes, "This was now the second sign that Jesus did" (John 4:54). In a precise statement of the purpose of the entire gospel, the author says, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 2:30.31). A sign is never an end in itself; it has the function of pointing away from itself to something or some one else. So at Cana, the important thing is not the miracle of the first-rate wine (of course it happened), but on the fact that "He manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him."

Brothers, this is only the beginning. We have very much work to do just to see clearly what is truly, definitively biblical and confessional. It takes a heap of "*oratio, meditatio, and tentatio*" to achieve that. We must have the humility to acknowledge that we have a long way to go, and to heed Luther's plea: "Therefore, I once again implore all Christians, especially pastors and preachers, not to try to be doctors prematurely and to imagine that they know everything. . . . Let them continue to read and teach, to learn and meditate and ponder. Let them never stop until they have proved by experience that they have taught the devil to death and have become wiser than God Himself and all His saints" (Large Cat., Long Pref., 19). In view of this, I cannot escape the conviction that we should never have come to this impasse, that there was no call to lower the boom. Beloved brothers, let us all clasp each other's hand, holding each other up and bearing each other's burden, and together lay our clasped hands into the mighty and gentle hand of our God, and pray: "Take Thou my hands and lead me," and have the courage to take Him at His Word.

Appendix

Another chapter needs to be written on what the Lutheran Confessions have to say about all these matters, but now is not the time. At the end of this program there should be the words that we find at the close of an installment

in a magazine serial: (To be continued). Here I shall point only briefly to a few things. How Lutherans (according to the Book of Concord) view the church's nature, mission, methods of operation, attitudes, and resources, and their understanding and use of the Scriptures—all this cries for calm, thorough and fraternal study and deliberation, before we are quick to attach labels. Anyone who takes the Confessions seriously can be neither legalistic nor antinomian, nor can he be guilty of what is expressed in the neological, horrible, and half-baked (it says either too much or too little) phrase, "Gospel-reductionism." Yet the Gospel is the pervading perspective of Lutheran confessional theology.

How do the Lutheran Confessions deal with differences? What teachings are rejected? Which controversies demanded settlement? By what criteria were judgments regarding these questions arrived at? What, in fact, is their view of what constitutes "doctrine," and what are "doctrinal" differences? Are all differences treated in the same way? In my somewhat extensive dealing with the Lutheran Confessions I have made some surprising, even startling, but always exhilarating and faith-strengthening discoveries, which have led me to esteem these documents as the finest Christian literature since the New Testament and to love them with all my heart. They have forced me to scuttle some previously held opinions and drastically revise others as to what is "authentically" Lutheran and biblical. In the process I have, by the grace of God, become more "conservatively" Lutheran than I was before. More than ever I wholeheartedly subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions as a "true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God," and that is why I am where I am, "soberly, advisedly, and in the fear of God." And that is the authentic, Lutheran, "historic" position of our church. I will cheerfully accept fraternal admonition and correction that is based on the Scriptures and the Confessions. In the words of the Book of Concord (Preface, Tappert, p. 13), I offer "to do and to continue to do everything that is useful and profitable to the increase and expansion of God's praise and glory, to the propagation of that Word of His that alone brings salvation, to the tranquillity and peace of Christian schools and churches, and to the needed consolation and instruction of poor, misguided consciences."

Passiontide, 1975

HERBERT J. A. BOUMAN

GOSPEL—SCRIPTURE RELATIONSHIP

When Dr. August Bernthal approached me some time ago about preparing a paper for this convocation on the relationship between the Gospel and the Scripture, two things were at once clear to me: 1. That if the Lord willed, and would give me life and health so that I could prepare this study, I must do it for the welfare of our troubled Synod and 2. That I would not dare to copy what any mere man had said on the subject, but that I would have to search the Scripture from beginning to end, in order that I might let it speak to our question.

Before I got started reading the Scripture, a passage from Romans I came to my mind which was to serve as my guiding star in my examination of the Old Testament. The passage, which stands at the very beginning of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans reads: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son . . ."

This is really an astonishing statement with respect to the Old Testament for our church at such a time as this. God promised the Gospel beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, which can here refer only to the Old Testament. We all know that the Old Testament is in our time an embattled part of Holy Scripture. Some scholars cannot find Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament; others claim to find varying and even contradictory theologies in it. St. Paul found in it a promise of the Gospel. Let us examine the Old Testament together to see whether a promise of the Gospel is indeed found in it.

In this examination I shall probably bring little to light which you have not already heard and already know. But I propose to run through the Old Testament, indicating how full it is throughout of promises made by God in particular to the people of Israel, and that these promises are in reality one massive promise of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. The Promises of God

Well known is the promise which God gave to Adam and Eve in paradise, a promise strangely wrapped in a curse on the serpent: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel," Gen. 3:15. This passage has rightly received the name "protevangelium" in the Christian church, for it has been understood, and rightly understood as a promise of the Gospel and all it entails.

Whether God gave any additional Gospel promises before the time of

Abraham we do not know. If there were any, they have not been recorded. But with the time of Abraham a promise comes, a Gospel promise, or a promise of the Gospel, which continues to sound forth throughout the Old, and into the New Testament. When God called Abraham to go from his country and from his kindred and from his father's house to the land He would show him, He gave him this promise: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves," Gen. 12:1-3.

On the surface of it, one might not be able to understand this as a promise of the Gospel. One might be inclined to see it merely as a promise of earthly blessings. Scripture however does not permit us to take so shallow a view of this promise made to Abraham. In that very same chapter of Genesis we read of a famine in the land of Canaan which compelled Abraham temporarily to go to Egypt. There Pharaoh's servants saw Sarah, Abraham's wife, who was a very beautiful woman, beautiful enough to be added to the harem of the then Pharaoh, and so she was taken into Pharaoh's house. But, mindful of his promise to Abraham, "the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abraham's wife," V. 17. Pharaoh lets her go. The promise of God to Abraham was sacred, and God would allow no one, not even a king of Egypt, to bring it to naught.

In the months and years to follow God's promise to Abraham is not only repeated, but enlarged. Gen. 13:14 ff we read: "The Lord said to Abraham, 'Lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward, and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see I will give to you and to your descendants for ever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your descendants also can be counted. Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.'" Until now we could still understand all this as not a promise of the Gospel, but simply a promise of earthly blessings.

In succeeding chapters of Genesis we hear the promise repeated, but with additions. Gen. 15:1 The word of the Lord comes to Abraham in a vision, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." Abraham complains that he has no child; how can his descendants be numerous as the dust of the earth? He is thinking of making his chief steward his heir. But God says: "This man shall not be your heir; your own son shall be your heir." He takes Abraham outside into the night and says, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

Time does not suffice us to quote all the promises God made to Abraham, neither do you need this, for most of you have been acquainted with them from childhood. Promise follows after promise until Sarah bears Isaac in her old age as the son of promise. The promise now descends on Isaac. In Gen. 26:1-5

we read about a famine in the land in the days of Isaac. God then tells Isaac, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfil the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give to your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves: because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." Gen. 26:23 we read: "From there he (Isaac) went up to Beersheba. And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, 'I am the God of Abraham your father; fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your descendants for my servant Abraham's sake."

In the next chapter Scripture tells how Rebekah persuaded Jacob to steal the blessing which Isaac had intended for Esau. The blessing as recorded clearly harks back to the blessing of Abraham without being the blessing in full. It reads:

See, the smell of my son
is as the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed!
May God give you of the dew of heaven,
and of the fatness of the earth,
and plenty of grain and wine.
Let peoples serve you,
and nations bow down to you.
Be lord over your brothers,
and may your mother's sons bow down to you.
Cursed be every one who curses you,
and blessed be every one who blesses you!"

Gen. 27:27-29

Yet for all Jacob's duplicity and wrongdoing it was he who was to be the real carrier of the promise given to Abraham. When Jacob was obliged to flee from his brother Esau, Isaac called him and made up for any lack in the blessing he had originally given him. He said: "God almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your descendants with you . . ." Gen. 28:3.4. That night Jacob had the wonderful prophetic dream of the ladder which reached from earth to heaven. And he heard God, who stood above the ladder, say to him, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants; and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land: for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you," Gen. 28:12-15.

Here the promise of Abraham descends on Jacob, not through the mouth of Isaac, but through the mouth of God Himself.

Jacob is not allowed to forget the promise. Later, when in the days of the dreadful famine Jacob is compelled to journey into Egypt with all his, God appears to him in the visions of the night, and says, "Jacob, Jacob." . . . Then he said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt; for I will there make of you a great nation. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again . . ." Gen. 46:2-4.

When, in Egypt, the time comes for Jacob himself to die, he calls his sons and blesses them, every one with his individual blessing. Though the blessing of Abraham, which had descended through Isaac to Jacob is not specifically mentioned, the blessing which Jacob bestows on his son Judah is remarkable, and has a messianic ring, as Christian scholars have recognized through the ages. The blessing reads: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Binding his foal to the vine and his ass's colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes; his eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk," Gen. 49:10-12.

New here is the fact that one of Jacob's sons, Judah, is singled out to be the ancestor of a race of rulers which comes to its climax in a person to whom the ruler's staff belongs, and whom peoples will obey.

The book of Exodus tells in the first chapter how Israel, in accord with the promises of God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, multiplied exceedingly in the land of Egypt, so that the then Pharaoh began to be afraid, and decided to oppress them. In the next chapter we are told that the people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and that their cry under bondage came up to God. "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered the covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob," Ex. 2:23.24. It was then that God appeared to Moses on Mt. Horeb, where he was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro. In the course of this revelation God said to Moses: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," Ex. 3:6. Remembering His promises to the patriarchs, God adds: "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey. . . . Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt," Ex. 3:7.8.10.

Now God will keep not only His promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but will also carry out His curse against those who curse Abraham and his descendants: He says to Moses, "I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand and smite Egypt with all the wonders which I will do in it . . ." Ex. 3:19.20.

How God carried this threat to the bitter end is written in Exodus chapters 7-11 which describe the ten plagues visited on Egypt, culminating in the killing of the first-born.

In all this God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He says to Moses, who was discouraged by the rigor with which the Israelites were being treated: "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they dwelt as sojourners. Moreover I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold in bondage and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, . . . and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God. . . .' Ex. 6:2-7.

The climax of all this comes in the destruction of the Egyptian army in the Sea of Reeds as described Ex. ch. 14. Truly, God cursed those who cursed and oppressed the descendants of Abraham.

Where in all this, you may well ask, is there a hint that this belongs to the Gospel as promised in the Old Testament? In Exodus 12 we are told of the institution of the Passover, in which the blood of lambs over the doorposts of the Israelites protected them from the hand of the angel of death. Whether Israel knew it or not, the Passover was, according to the New Testament, a type of Christ, the bringer of the Gospel. This is also true of many of the offerings of animals commanded to the Israelites especially in the book of Leviticus. And among these it is true in a particularly outstanding manner of the sacrifice on the great day of atonement described in Leviticus ch. 16.

I will pass over here as sufficiently known to all of us the significance of other types in the Old Testament, the laws about meats and drink, about new moons and sabbath days, all of which were, according to the New Testament, shadows of things to come, while the reality is in Christ and in the Gospel, Col. 2:16.17.

God had, according to his ancient promise, miraculously led the children of Israel out of the bondage of Egypt. We should think they would have been a thankful people who would keep God's commandments from the heart. But hardly had they reached safety, and had, encamped at the foot of Mt. Sinai, received the ten commandments amid terrible manifestations of thunder and lightning and fire, when they turned their backs on God, and made and worshiped the golden calf, as recorded Ex. ch. 32:1-6. When God wanted to consume this idolatrous people in His righteous wrath, He was reminded by Moses of His promise to Abraham and his descendants: "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou didst swear by thine own self, and didst say to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'"

An interesting sidelight on the blessing of God on Abraham and his descendants is the account of Balaam, the Midianite prophet who was hired by Balak, the king of Moab, to curse Israel. Each time Balaam tried to curse Israel, God constrained him to bless instead of cursing them, Numbers 22–24.

All this could still be interpreted non-Messianically, as a mere delight in this people for its own sake. But more and more the promises take on Messianic coloring. When Moses was about to die he told the children of Israel: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren—him you shall heed—. . .” Deut. 18:15.

The promise of the land of Canaan as an inheritance for the children of Israel was fulfilled after forty years wandering in the wilderness. We read Joshua 21:43-45: “Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land which he swore to give to their fathers; and having taken possession of it, they settled there. And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers; not one of all their enemies had withheld them, for the Lord had given all their enemies into their hands. Not one of all the good promises which the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.”

Israel then went through the disastrous period of the judges, during which they often turned their backs on the God of Abraham, and served idols, for which they were again and again sold into the hands of their enemies. But always, when they repented and returned the Lord was merciful to them and delivered them.

It was during the period of the Kings that God clarified the promises given of old to the fathers, and added to them. The promises then become much more visibly Messianic. In the days of David the word of the Lord came to Nathan, the prophet: “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. . . .’ Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be a prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast

love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.’’ 2 Sam. 7:4-17.

This prophecy is taken up in a Word of God in Ps. 89:35-37. ‘‘Once for all have I sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His line shall endure for ever, his throne as long as the sun before me. Like the moon it shall be established forever; it shall stand firm while the skies endure.’’

Moreover there are passages in the Book of Psalms which well accord with St. Paul’s statement in Romans 1, that the Gospel was promised by God through the prophets in the Old Testament Scriptures. Into whose mouth do the words Ps. 40:6-9 fit but into the mouth of the Messiah: ‘‘Sacrifice and burnt offering thou dost not desire; but thou hast given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering thou hast not required. Then I said, Lo, I come; in the roll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart.’’ And all of Psalm 22, which appears to describe the crucifixion of Christ almost point by point, where does it fit but into the mouth of the Messiah?

The promise of the Gospel becomes yet plainer in the great literary prophets. How but as a promise of the Gospel and its sweep through the world can we understand the promise in Is. 2:2-4: ‘‘It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.’’

It accords fully with the statement of Paul in Romans 1 about the promise of the Gospel in the Old Testament when Isaiah prophesies, Is. 4:2 ff.: ‘‘In that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel. And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, every one who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning.’’

With St. Matthew we find a promise of the Gospel also in the embattled passage Is. 7:14: ‘‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.’’ Not being a prophet, not even a New Testament prophet who is believed to have been able to interpret the Old Testament authoritatively, I confess to being unable to answer all questions about this prophecy. But with Matthew I must and do understand it as belonging to the

promises of the Gospel in the Old Testament.

Far less difficult to understand as a promise of the Gospel is the prophecy in Is. 9:2-7: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased its joy; they rejoice before thee as with joy at the harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, thou hast broken as in the day of Midian. For every boot of the trampling warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called 'Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.' Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this."

From the time of Isaiah on the promise of God to David through Nathan receives new light from time to time, and it becomes apparent that it is a promise of the Gospel.

In Isaiah 11:1-10 we read: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious."

This prophecy clearly points to the house of David, but the root of Jesse cannot be merely a human Davidic king. The prophecy points to someone infinitely higher,—the Messiah and his kingdom. Here the Gospel is promised.

We could continue to run through all the prophetic books of the Old Testament and come up with one prophecy after another which bears out the truth of Paul's statement in Romans 1, that God promised the Gospel beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures. The magnitude of our task and

the limits to our time demand that from here on we make a choice of what appear to us to be the clearest and strongest passages.

We find what we consider a very strong passage in Is. 25:6-8. "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast on all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken." It would seem that this passage speaks for itself as a promise of the Gospel, and that it needs no comment from us.

We quote the following passages which are promises of God that seem to need no comment. Is. 28:16. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, 'Behold, I am laying in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'He who believes will not be in haste.' "

Of fundamental importance for our discussion of the Gospel as being promised in the Old Testament are the servant passages, Is. 50-53. To rule the Messiah out of these passages and to make the servant simply Israel, or the godly in Israel, cannot do justice to these passages. True, Israel was called to be God's obedient servant, but all too often turned out to be disobedient and rebellious. The obedient, suffering servant in Isaiah 52 and 53 is an individual who bears the griefs of his disobedient brethren, and carries their sorrows. He is always in the singular: "He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed." Ch. 53:5. "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." "He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors," V. 12.

It is a Gospel call which goes out in Isaiah 55: "Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Hearken diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in fatness. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples. Behold, you shall call nations that you know not, and nations that you knew not shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, and the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." This, I submit, is not only a promise of the Gospel, this is the Gospel in the Old Testament.

Of the many additional passages which could be quoted from the prophets for the truth of Paul's statement in Romans I, that God beforehand promised

the Gospel through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, we shall quote only a few more. The first is from the prophet Jeremiah, ch. 31:31-34: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts: and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

What Israelite, reading this passage about a new covenant, under which God would forgive the iniquity of His people and remember their sin no more, could fail to read this as a promise of the Gospel?

I would like now to introduce one prophecy from the Book of Amos, Ch. 9:11-15: "In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name," says the Lord who does this. "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land which I have given them, says the Lord your God."

I have chosen to quote this passage, because it is interpreted by James in Acts 15:15 ff., as referring to the coming of the Gentiles into the Christian church. The passage has parallels in the prophets, speaking of great prosperity of Israel, all in earthly terms of corn, and wine, and peace. These passages, biblically understood, are promises of the Gospel which God promised beforehand through His prophets in the sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament.

2. How did Pious Israelites Understand the Promises of God in the Old Testament?

The question with which we open this part of our discussion is one which we ought to ask. God gave His Word, and particularly His promises, to His people in order that they might be understood, believed, acted on. How did Israelites at the time of the Old Testament understand the promises?

The question is not easy to answer, because the Israelites to whom the promises were addressed are dead. So we can't ask them how they understood

the promises.

We might well anticipate that even the best among the Israelites did not understand the full implications of these promises. The promises came as prophecies, often in the garb of highly prophetic and poetic language.

Here the New Testament is of some help. It shows us that some Israelites understood something of the promises, but misunderstood and misinterpreted the promises as a whole most abominably. The scribes at the time of Christ knew that Messiah was to come as a deliverer. They could even tell Herod where the King of the Jews was to be born, Matth. 2:3-6. But they misunderstood the nature of this king and of His kingdom so completely, that they rejected their king and crucified Him. There were, however, at Jerusalem also Israelites at the time of the birth of Christ who not only gave heed to the promises of the Gospel in the Old Testament, but who also showed a far better understanding of them than did the Pharisees and scribes. Such a one was the priest Zechariah, to whom the angel Gabriel had revealed that he was to become the father of the Voice in the wilderness promised in Isaiah 40, and who in what he said on the day of the circumcision of his son connected the then present events with the promises of the Gospel in the Old Testament:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has visited and redeemed his people.
and has raised up an horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David.
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
that we should be saved from our enemies,
and from the hand of all who hate us;
to perform the mercies promised to our fathers,
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us
that we being delivered from the hand of our enemies
might serve him without fear,
in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.
And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
through the tender mercy of our God,
when the day shall dawn upon us from on high
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Luke 1:68-69

These are the words of a child of God who has understood the Old Testament as a promise of the Gospel.

Other such Israelites who had at least to a great extent understood the promises of the Gospel in the Old Testament were the Virgin Mary who hearing from the angel Gabriel that she was to conceive in her womb and bear a

Son, who would be great, and be called the Son of the Most High, and that God would give Him the throne of His father David in order that he might reign over the house of Jacob forever, simply answered, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word," Luke 1, 30-38; aged Simeon, who looked for the consolation of Israel, Luke 2:25, and Anna the prophetess, who on the occasion of Mary's purification came into the temple at that hour, and spoke of the Messiah to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem, Luke 2:36-38; such a one was Philip, whom Jesus called to be His disciple, and who, on finding Nathanael, said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph," John 1:45. Such, we may believe, were all the disciples whom the Lord called, and many more in Israel who, on hearing of Christ's words and deeds, asked, "Can this be the son of David?" Matth. 12:23. Inadequate as the understanding of many pious Israelites was, as the example of the disciples shows even on Easter evening and on the day of our Lord's ascension, Luke 24:45; Acts 1:6, one thing is certain, they had understood that the message of the Old Testament is a promise of the Gospel, of a King of Israel, of a Messiah who was to visit and redeem his people.

3. What is this Gospel, which God promised by His Holy Prophets in the Scripture of the Old Testament?

Having seen that the Old Testament contains as at least a most important part God's promise of the Gospel, and having seen that many godly persons in Israel at the dawn of the New Testament realized this, although they certainly did not understand the prophetic utterances fully, we might feel inclined to ask at this point: And what is the relation of the New Testament to these promises of the Gospel made in the Old?

The question is certainly legitimate and must in time be faced. I believe, however, that there are a few prior questions which we must face if we want to give our synod the help which it needs in its present difficulties. One of these questions might seem to be so simple, that you might feel offended that I even dare to raise it. Yet I feel that it must be raised, because lack of understanding and misunderstanding comes to the surface again and again also in our own church. The question then is: What is this Gospel which was promised in the Old Testament?

The Gospel has been called a doctrine. Rightly understood, this certainly is correct. In the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* according to the Tappert translation we read under Art. IV. Of Justification: "In this controversy the main doctrine of Christianity is involved." Later in the same article we read: "All Scripture should be divided into these two chief doctrines, the law and the promises." Tappert, p. 107, 108. The translation reflects the use of the term doctrine which came into the Lutheran church, not with the Reformation, but with the dogmaticians of the 17th century. It does

not reflect the original accurately in either case. The first reference reads in the Latin: *Quum autem in hac controversia praecipuus locus doctrinae Christianae agitur, etc.* (Since in this controversy the chief topic of Christian doctrine is treated.) In German it reads: *Dieweil aber solcher Zank ist ueber dem hoechsten, vornehmsten Artikel der ganzen christlichen Lehre.* The second quotation reads in Latin: *Universa Scriptura is hos duos locos praecipuos distribui debet: in legem et promissiones,* (All of Scripture ought to be divided into these two chief topics: the law and the promises). In German the passage reads: *Die ganze Schrift beide Alten und Neuer Testaments wird in die zwei Stuecke geteils und lehrt diese zwei Stuecke, naemlich Gesetz und goettliche Verheissungen.**

You will note that the Gospel is here not called a doctrine, but the chief part or topic or article of the Christian doctrine. But we have become accustomed to calling the Gospel a doctrine, and I do not feel that I should quarrel about this, but merely call attention to the fact that this is probably not the best way to designate the Gospel.

But how shall we designate it? What is the Gospel? It is what its name implies, *euaggelion*, a good message, good news. What makes news? It is what somebody does or has done that makes news. Webster's dictionary defines news as a report of any recent event. It was a recent event which got the term Gospel, good news, into our New Testament; an angel from heaven told the shepherds on the field of Bethlehem: "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." He could have said: I bring you the good news that God has fulfilled the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to David and to all the house of Israel. He has sent the King who has been promised so long, and for whom the godly in Israel have longed and sighed through the centuries. The Gospel is truly the news of the Gospel, promised by God through His Holy prophets in the Scripture of the Old Testament, fulfilled in the birth of Christ.

Since we are attempting to define the Gospel, let us get ahead of ourselves a bit and use the Scripture for this purpose, also the Scripture of the New Testament. If I were to define the Gospel according to the Old Testament, I would look for the promise of God in Jeremiah, Ch. 31: V. 33.34: "This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts. . . . for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more."

If I wanted to define the Gospel according to the New Testament I would start with Mark 1:1: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." I would then show that the term "gospel" is here used in a wide sense for an account of how God kept His ancient promises, sent His Son into the world, and of what Jesus said and did in redeeming mankind from sin and from

* These quotations are from Concordia Triglotta, p. 120.

damnation. The same would hold of all the four books in the New Testament which we call the Gospels. They tell us what God did through His Son Jesus Christ.

If I now wanted to define the Gospel in the narrower sense, in which it is used both in the New Testament and in the language of the church, I might turn to 1 Cor. 15:1-4: where Paul says: "Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved. . . . For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, but that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. . . ." To this I would add 2 Cor. 5:19-21: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. . . . For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might be made the righteousness of God." And I might add Gal. 3:26.27: "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

This what we have, in the church, customarily called the Gospel in the narrower sense. The concept and the definition come straight out of the Scripture of the Old and of the New Testament.

I had indicated earlier that with my attempt to define the Gospel I was getting ahead of myself a bit. The topic assigned to me, Gospel—Scripture Relationship seems to me to call for a discussion of a point which we may be inclined to overlook. The New Testament did not come into existence in order that there might be a Gospel which might be preached, but because there was a Gospel which was already being preached. We remember the point made earlier, that the Gospel is not in the first place a doctrine, but news, the good news of something God has done, that He fulfilled the promises of the Gospel in the Old Testament by sending His Son into the flesh to save us from our sin and its consequences through His sacrificial death in our stead.

Good news needs to be proclaimed, and proclaimed it was. The shepherds, who heard the good news from the angel, went to see the child, and then "made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child," Luke 2:17. Some thirty years later John the Baptist, who had been sent by God to prepare the way for Christ, "preached, saying, 'After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down to untie. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit,'" Mark 1:7.8. According to John 1:29 ff. John said, as he saw Jesus coming toward him: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me. . . . I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

Surely, what John the Baptist preached was the Gospel which had been promised by God through the prophets in the Old Testament.

When John's ministry was cut short by arrest and then by death, we are told: "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe the gospel,'" Mark 1:14.15. There are many passages in all four Gospels which bear witness to Jesus' preaching ministry. I shall not cite them, for I am persuaded that you know them.

Jesus' preaching of the Gospel included repeated preaching of the fact that to fulfill the promises of the Gospel promised in Old Testament times He must go to Jerusalem "and everything that is written of the Son of man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon; they will scourge him and kill him, and on the third day he will rise," Luke 18:31-33.

What He foretold, particularly in His teaching of the twelve, was accomplished in His suffering and death. On Easter evening the risen Christ said to the Emmaus disciples, who were sad and confused on account of Christ's death: "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself," Luke 24:25-27. Thus did Christ Himself proclaim the Gospel, the good news that God had in Christ fulfilled the promises of the Gospel given in Old Testament times.

I need not remind you that both John and Jesus preached the Gospel before any part of the New Testament was written. The wonder is that also the apostles preached the Gospel for a full twenty years before any part of the New Testament was written. Christ had told them on Easter evening: "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem," Luke 24:46.47. A bit later they were directly commissioned to do this preaching: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age," Matth. 28:18-20.

That the apostles carried out this command to preach the Gospel to all nations the Book of Acts abundantly testifies. On the day of Pentecost they preached the wonderful works of God in Christ to a great multitude, of whom about 3,000 were brought to faith and baptized, Acts 2:14-41. From that day on we find, according to the Acts of the Apostles, that the apostles preached the Gospel of the crucified and risen Christ with great diligence and with great success in Jerusalem, so the rulers of the Jews thought it necessary to arrest them and forbid them to preach any more in the name of Jesus. But

they continued in spite of threats and imprisonment to proclaim the Gospel. We hear Peter saying to a crowd of Jews: "What God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out," Acts 3:18.19.

How could the apostles carry on their Gospel ministry for twenty years without a written New Testament? They had been eye and ear witnesses of the life and ministry of Christ. They had been instructed by Him, heard His preaching, seen His miracles. St. John refers to this in his first epistle: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life,—that we proclaim to you," 1 John 1:1.4. Peter declares: "We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty," 2 Pet. 1:16. When Judas had removed himself from the twelve by suicide, and it was necessary to elect a replacement, the necessary qualification for candidates for this office was: "One of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day he was taken up from us—one of them must become with us a witness to his resurrection," Acts 1:21.22.

The Bible of the Apostles in their founding of the Christian church was the Old Testament. To it they appealed, showing that what Jesus had preached and done, and what had been done to Him was all in fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and the people of Israel.

The Gospel is therefore a power in its own right. It does not get power from a book. It has its power because it is the proclamation of what God has done for the salvation first of His chosen people, and then also of the whole world. The Book can and does bear witness to the acts of God, but the Gospel is the good news of the wonderful works of God.

How powerful was that preached Gospel without any written New Testament is evidenced by the phenomenal growth of the Christian church during the first decades of the Christian era. In an unbelievably short time there were churches not only all over the Holy Land, but all over the Roman Empire.

But if the Gospel was so powerful without a written New Testament, then why was the New Testament written? We shall let the New Testament itself answer this question.

4. Why was the New Testament Written?

If I am to answer this question adequately I will have to face, at the same time, the question how, and by whom, and under what circumstances it was written. I shall not insult your intelligence by telling you that it was written by a number of writers at different times and not always with exactly the same purpose. You know all this. But let us get specific. Why were the Gospels

written? Let us let Luke tell us why he wrote his Gospel! "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed." Luke 1:1-4. According to this Luke wrote that a certain Theophilus might not have to depend on unauthorized and perhaps faulty accounts, but that he might know the truth about Jesus' life, preaching and work.

That, we may be certain, is the purpose of all four Gospels. The faith of the church, which had come into being through the preaching of the Apostles and of their assistants was to be based on accurate knowledge of the facts. The Gospel of John indicates that it was written in the interest of the faith of the church. "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." Ch. 20:30. It is plain, that the gospels were written in the interest of the Gospel, which had already been preached and was believed by the church.

What has been said of the Gospels is true also, though perhaps in a somewhat different way of the epistles in the New Testament. Paul did not write the epistle to the Romans in order that the Gospel might come to Rome, but because it was already in Rome, and a church already existed there. He felt an obligation to that congregation which he had not founded, which he had never visited. So, instead of preaching the Gospel there, he writes an epistle which sets forth the Gospel of Christ in a way not surpassed in any other New Testament epistle. He writes to the congregation at Corinth, which he himself had founded, but which he had left to preach the Gospel elsewhere. Conditions in the congregation at Corinth were such, that there was great danger that the apostle's work there would be severely damaged by schismatic activities and immorality. He found it necessary to recall this congregation to loyalty to the Gospel, and to a life in conformity with the Gospel.

The epistle to the Galatians Paul wrote because Judaizing preachers had perverted the Gospel in a way that it no longer was the Gospel of Christ, but another Gospel, which was not another, but a different one, not the Gospel at all.

So we could go through all the epistles in the New Testament and show that they were written, not to bring the Gospel, but because the Gospel had already been preached. They were written that the Gospel might be adhered to and preserved and preached in purity.

It would be a mistake if we stopped here and thought that we had fully told why the books of the New Testament were written. If we examine the epistles in particular, we will find that those who wrote them were deeply

concerned that the members of the existing churches should not only confess adherence to the Gospel, but that they should also, as Paul tells the Ephesians, "lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called," Eph. 4:1. To the Romans he writes: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect," Rom. 12:1.2.

The New Testament writers do not leave their readers in the Christian churches of their time in doubt as to what constitutes a life worthy of the Lord and of the Gospel. Every student of the Bible knows how full of instructions concerning the Christian life are the epistles in the New Testament, and the letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor in the Book of Revelation. These things are not something separate from the Gospel. They describe the life which those who have heard and believed the Gospel, and who have in Christ become new creatures, should live as a matter of course.

Therefore for those who first received the books of the New Testament these books came, not to bring the Gospel, but because the Gospel had come. They were written to explain the Gospel and its implications more fully, to enunciate and where necessary defend the articles of the Christian faith, and to help Christian churches walk as becometh the Gospel of Christ.

5. Gospel—Scripture Relationship for the church after the time of the apostles

In the above we have tried to show what was the purpose of writing the New Testament for the church that then was. Some nineteen hundred years have passed since that time. We are not in the same position in which the church was in the days of the apostles. The church at that time had, to a large extent at least, the benefit of those who had been eye and ear witnesses to the life, preaching, and sufferings of our Lord. But the apostles all died during that first century. Yet the Christian church is apostolic, as we confess in the Nicene Creed. It is built, and must continue to be built "on the foundation of the apostles and prophets," Eph. 2:20. Therefore the apostles and prophets, though long departed from the scene of their one-time labors, must continue to stand in a relationship to the church.

How this relationship with the church in our time can and must be maintained is not told us in so many words in the New Testament. It is, however, clearly stated in the Lutheran Confessions. I shall quote from the Formula of Concord: In the Epitome, under The Comprehensive Summary, Rule, and Norm according to which all Doctrines Should be Judged and the errors which Intruded should be Explained and Decided in a Christian Way, the Formula States:

We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged. . . .

This is stated in the Solid Declaration of the *Formula* as follows:

We pledge ourselves to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments as the pure and clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated.

In this last statement, taken from the Solid Declaration of the *Formula* it seems to me that we find the statement which most adequately sets forth what the relationship between Scripture and Gospel is for the church today. The prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are called "the pure clear fountain of Israel." A fountain gives forth water. A polluted fountain gives forth polluted water. A pure clear fountain gives forth pure, clear water. The Scripture is a pure clear fountain, and the water it gives forth is the doctrine which the church has believed through the ages, and which must continue to sound forth in the church. Therefore also any doctrine which does sound forth in the church must be willing to be judged by the water that comes forth from this pure, clear fountain.

To be practical about this,—all this means that the church must draw her understanding of the Gospel from Holy Scripture, where the Gospel was promised in the Old Testament, where the fulfillment of God's promises is shown in the four Gospels, and where the articles of the Gospel are explained and applied to the life of the church in the rest of the New Testament writings.

Teachers the church must have. It must have them, because Christ gave and continues to give them, and because the church needs them. But the source and norm for all their preaching and teaching is the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments.

We could perhaps close here, and believe that we had completed our assignment. I believe, however, that some important things remain to be said on the subject: Scripture—Gospel Relationships. One of the complaints in our church today is that there is Gospel reductionism present among us. I did not coin this term, and have some difficulty with it. It seems to me to mean that some want to make the Gospel the only thing that matters in the Bible and in the church, and that all else is unimportant, and can be given up.

If I have understood this correctly, then it hangs together with a number of other things, some of which will, I am certain, be dealt with in Dr. Tepker's paper, one of which, however, I feel that I must deal with. It is the question where the Law of God fits into all this. There are complaints in our church also that there is antinomianism present among us, that some speak slightly about the law, as though Christians no longer had any need for it. It has even been said that some say (whether this is so or not, I do not know), that it is only the Gospel which gives the Scripture its authority.

This, I would submit, is at the very least, bad thinking. The Law is God's Law just as certainly as the Gospel is God's Gospel. The Law came to man in ancient Israel as the Word of God, and the commandments and precepts of God are called His Word in the Old Testament just as well as are His oracles, His promises given to and through the prophets. What we can and must maintain about the Gospel in this connection is that the Gospel gives the Scripture its uniqueness, for as the great orientalist Max Muller pointed out, the Scripture is the only book among the books of the ancient religions of the East which has the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins through the suffering, death, and resurrection of the incarnate Son of God.* But when I say that the Gospel gives the Holy Scripture its uniqueness, I am not saying that it is the Gospel which gives the Scripture its authority. It has its authority from the fact of its inspiration. Law and Gospel are both the Word of God. Both are authoritative, each in its way. Both are also of the greatest importance for the church, and, let me say, for each other.

6. The Relationship of Law and Gospel to Each Other in Holy Scripture and in the Preaching of the Church

Any attentive Bible reader soon sees that there is a very close relationship in Scripture between God's Law and His Gospel. His Law was first. It had been written on the hearts of Adam and Eve, and it continued to be written on man's heart also after the fall into sin, as the examples of Cain, Abraham, Pharaoh, Abimelech the Philistine chief, and Joseph, with his question to Potiphar's wife: "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God" plainly show.

This moral law was never repealed by God. In fact it was solemnly given by God to Israel on Mt. Sinai. When it was broken by the children of Israel, God punished them, and led them back to obedience. He promised through Jeremiah that in the days of the Messiah He would make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like His first covenant, which they broke again and again. But though He made that New Covenant with Israel in Christ, He still did not cancel the moral Law or abrogate it. Christ Himself says, "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven." Matth. 5:17-19.

Instead of abolishing the moral Law Jesus explained the commandments in their deep, incisive meaning, and in His own life fulfilled the law for sinful man. All that He abolished in connection with Law was the ceremonial Law,

* For the full statement see Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 4, footnote 6.

which was temporary, being a shadow of things to come while the reality is in Christ, Col. 2:17.

If the Gospel is to be at all meaningful to man, the Law must be preached and do its work with man. By the Law, says Scripture, is the knowledge of sin. Christ, the fulfiller of the promise of the Old Testament about the Gospel, came to save men from their sins. The Gospel is the announcement, the news that God has through the suffering and death of Christ reconciled the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, 2 Cor. 5:19. Take away the Law and the preaching of the law, and there will be no need for the Gospel.

But even after the Law has done its work, convicting man of sin, and the Gospel has come in after the Law, drawing man to God, moving him to accept the offered forgiveness of sins for Jesus' sake by faith, the Christian still needs the law. He needs it, lest he fall into carnal security, forget that he is a sinner, fail to recognize the sins which he still commits in thought, word, and deed, and fall away from the faith. True, it is because of his Old Adam that he needs it, but because he retains his Old Adam so long as he lives, he needs the law as long as he lives.

This far some Lutherans with antinomian tendencies might go along with what has been said. But here, they insist, the law must stop. Beyond this it is not necessary for Christians. This view our confessions do not share, neither does Holy Scripture. Our confessions, notably the Formula of Concord in Article VI on the third Use of the Law, insist that Christians need the Law also to show them what God's will is for their lives.

Some Christians, and also Lutherans, seem to be laboring here under a serious misunderstanding. They have read in Scripture that Christians are not under the Law but under grace. Paul writes Romans 6:15: "Are we to sin because we are not under the law but under grace?" Some Christians seem to understand this about our not being under the law as meaning that the Law no longer has anything to say to us. This, I submit, is a serious misunderstanding. The Law remains God's Law and the proclamation of the Law remains God's Word, also after we have become Christians. What our Confessions understand by the third use of the law is something to which the Scripture bears abundant witness. To get this straight let me try first of all to show what it means to be under the law or not under the law. The term "under" here implies a boss, a driver. Some pastors use the law to drive their members. What they accomplish is only to make them either afraid or hypocritical, or rebellious, perhaps most often rebellious. The Christian use of the Law for Christians is to use the Law to show what the will of God is. Let no one imagine that Christians do not need this instruction. Questions of right and wrong can be very vexing questions for Christians. We don't become omniscient in matters of right and wrong when the Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel. We do become concerned about these questions. And here God's law performs a valuable service to Christians. It instructs them with respect to the will of God, helps them to see what the will of God is. But there it must stop. The Christian is

not under God's law, as though he had to be driven. The Christian is a new creature, who wants to do the will of God. True, the Old Adam in the Christian does not want to do it. But in Christians the new man is to be in control. He does not need to be driven by the law. He needs to be drawn by the Gospel.

And so St. Paul, who could use the law so masterfully to show the will of God, and never left his readers in doubt with respect to it, says to the Romans, Ch. 12:1: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." When he wants to draw the Christians at Corinth, many of whom had lived in gross immorality before becoming Christians, away from these evil deeds, he does not threaten them with the law, but reminds them: "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and in the Spirit of our God," 1 Cor. 6:11. When he wants a good collection out of the Corinthian Christians, he does not drive them with a legalistic harangue, but tells them, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich," 2 Cor. 8:9.

Therefore, far from considering the law of God as something that has been abolished by the Gospel, as something that has nothing to say to us, we look on it as St. Paul looked on it. He says, Rom. 7:12: "So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good." Of himself he says, "So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind," Rom. 7:25. In fact, the great apostle of the Gospel tells us that the purpose of the law is accomplished in us through the Gospel: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, he condemned sin in the flesh, IN ORDER THAT THE JUST REQUIREMENT OF THE LAW MIGHT BE FULFILLED IN US, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit," Rom. 8:1-4. How important the law is in the life of Christians Paul tells the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 7:19: "Neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, BUT KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD."

It would be worth our while, if time permitted, to quote the whole of the Affirmative Theses on the correct teaching concerning the third use of the law from the Epitome of the Formula of Concord. In the interest of saving time we shall quote only the most striking sentences:

We believe, teach, and confess that although people who genuinely believe and whom God has truly converted are freed through Christ from the curse and the coercion of the law, they are not on that account without the law; on the contrary, they have been redeemed by the Son of God precisely that they should exercise themselves day and night in the law (Ps. 119:1). In the same way our first parents even before the Fall did not live without the law, for the law of God was written into their hearts when they were created in the image of God.

Although they are indeed reborn and have been renewed in the spirit of their mind, such regeneration and renewal is incomplete in this world. In fact, it has only begun, and in the spirit of their mind the believers are in a constant war against their flesh (that is, their corrupt nature and kind), which clings to them until death. On account of this Old Adam, who inheres in people's intellect, will, and all their powers, it is necessary for the law of God constantly to light their way lest in their merely human devotion they undertake self-decreed and self-chosen acts of serving God. This is further necessary lest the Old Adam go his self-willed way. He must be coerced against his own will not only by the admonitions and threats of the law, but also by punishments and plagues, to follow the Spirit and surrender himself a captive . . .

Quoted from Tappert, p. 480

7. Some Conclusions for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in our Time

For a fallen world God in mercy gave the world His saving Gospel. He promised it through His prophets in the Old Testament in promises that became more clear and explicit as the time for the fulfillment of the promises drew near. "When the fulness of the time had come God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons," Gal. 4:4.5. That Gospel calls men into communion with Christ, makes them members of His body, 1 Cor. 12:12-31, and calls them to love of one another, to be at peace among themselves, and in the interest of peace to practice lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, Eph. 4:2.3. In the body of Christ there is no room for factionalism and schismatic activities, no room for hatred of fellow Christians and backbiting, no room for carrying on a spiritual war with worldly weapons. The weapons of our warfare dare not be political machinations and slanders against one another. When serious disagreements of a doctrinal nature arise, as they have arisen among us, we need to do what the apostles did when the errors of Judaizing teachers threatened to rend the infant church into two opposing camps. They met; both sides stated their views. The views were examined according to the facts and according to the Scriptures, and then peace was restored, Acts 15.

May God give us grace to follow the example of the apostles and of the early church in lowliness and meekness, and in the spirit of the prophet who brought this word of God to Zerubbabel during the difficult time when he was rebuilding the temple after the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity:

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts."
Zech. 4:6.

Summary Statements

1. There is an intimate relationship between the Gospel and the Scripture of the Old Testament in that God, in the Old Testament, gave a long series of promises which must be viewed as promises of the Gospel, and which were fulfilled in the incarnation, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ.
2. While many Israelites undoubtedly disregarded these promises, and others misunderstood and misinterpreted them, there were also many Israelites who understood these promises as promises of the Gospel, believed in them, rejoiced in them, and waited for their fulfillment in the Messiah.
3. The Gospel is not in the first place a doctrine, but news of an event, the good news that God has out of great love for a humanity lost in sin sent His only-begotten Son into the world, conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, to redeem man from sin and its consequences by His vicarious suffering, death, and resurrection.
4. It was the will of God that this Gospel should be orally proclaimed in all the world. And it was proclaimed orally for twenty years before any part of the New Testament was written, and for sixty years or more before the last book of the New Testament was written.
5. The Gospel, which was proclaimed for some decades before the New Testament was written, proved remarkably powerful, for the Christian church experienced a growth during those decades which it has probably never equalled in a like period of time since. Therefore the power of the Gospel does not, in the first instance, come from a book; it resides in the Gospel itself which, whether proclaimed orally or in writing, is the good news of the wonderful works of God for man's salvation.
6. The New Testament was written, in the first instance not in order that the Gospel might come, but because it had come. It was written in order that the churches which had come into being through the oral proclamation of the Gospel might be strengthened in their faith, grow in knowledge and understanding, remain faithful, and might adorn their profession with a life worthy of the Gospel.
7. Because the church in later ages has not the advantage of the presence of the apostles and of others who had been eye and earwitnesses of Christ's preaching and ministry, the church today must depend on Holy Scripture, in particular on the Scripture of the New Testament, for accurate information about the person and work of Christ. The prophetic and apostolic Scriptures are therefore, as the Formula of Concord says, both the fountain from which the teaching of the church must be drawn, and the rule and norm according to which all teachers and doctrines must be judged.
8. While Christians treasure Holy Scripture as that book in which the Gospel

of their salvation is not only promised, but also revealed, taught, explained, and applied, they must be aware that the Holy Scripture contains also the Law of God, and that this Law, even as the Gospel, is also the Word of God, and that without the Law the Gospel would have little or no meaning for sinful man. Therefore Christians apply the Law to themselves, both in order that they may ever recognize their need for a Savior and His Gospel, and also that it may show them how God wants them to live, although the motivation for such a life must come, not from the Law, but from the Gospel.

9. While the Gospel gives the Holy Scripture a uniqueness among the so-called holy books, its authority does not come from the Gospel alone, but rather from the fact that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and contains both words of God, namely the Law and the Gospel, both of which are necessary for Christian faith and life, and therefore for the welfare of the church of God.

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